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# NO MAN'S LAND

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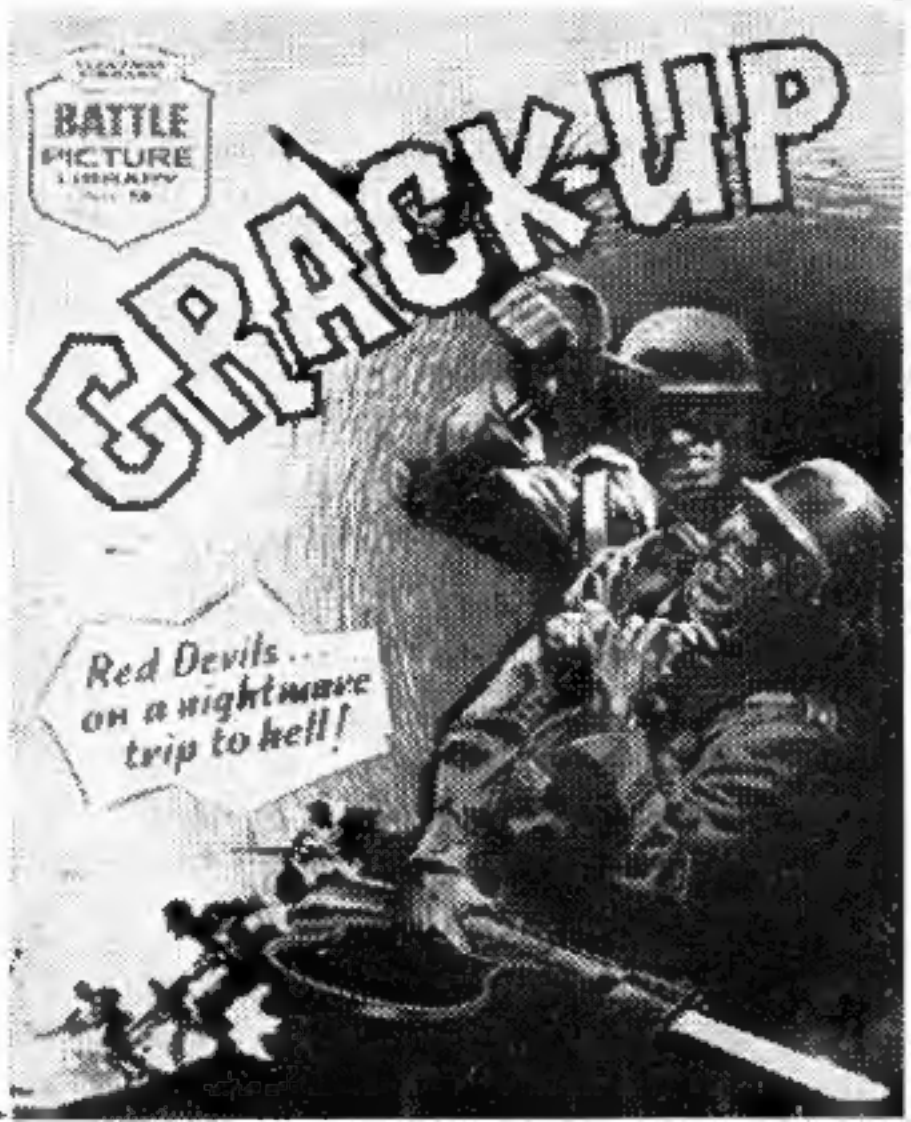

# No Man's Land

BY CHRISTMAS OF 1941, THE LONG, PUNISHING CAMPAIGN IN THE WESTERN DESERT HAD SWUNG IN FAVOUR OF THE BRITISH EIGHTH ARMY. IT WAS THE TURN OF ROMMEL'S AFRIKA KORPS TO BEAT A HASTY RETREAT TO DEFENSIVE POSITIONS WEST OF BENGHAZI.

THE MAJOR LAND BATTLE DWINDLED INTO SKIRMISHES AND PROBING PATROLS AS EACH SIDE TRIED OUT THE OTHER'S STRENGTH.

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# Chapter 1. DISASTER PATROL

FROM THE FIRST, COLONEL BOWLEY HAD TAKEN A LIKING TO BOB HUDSON. THE LIEUTENANT HAD PROVED HIMSELF A TOUGH AND COURAGEOUS FIGHTER. BUT LIKE THE YOUNG, OF COURSE, HE HAD HIS FAILINGS...
WHEN THAT BOY LEARNS TO FIGHT WITH HIS BRAINS, JIM, AS WELL AS HE DOES WITH HIS WEAPONS, HE'LL GO FAR.
YOU'RE RIGHT THERE, SIR. WAR ISN'T ALL BRAWN.

THE PATROL RAN INTO BAD LUCK FROM THE START. A FRACTURED FUEL PIPE DELAYED THEM AN HOUR BEFORE THEY REACHED THE ENEMY FRONTIER WIRE BUT IT DID NOT SHAKE BOB'S DETERMINATION TO CARRY OUT HIS MISSION...
WE HAVEN'T TOO MUCH TIME, SIR.
SSSH... WE'LL SOON BE THROUGH THIS LOT, SERGEANT!

# No Man's Land

THAT FIRST LINE OF BARBED WIRE WAS SOON BREACHED AND THEY MOVED ON... MORE CAUTIOUSLY NOW FOR THEY WERE ON THE ENEMY'S OWN DOORSTEP...

NO NERVE-SHATTERING BLAST OF ENEMY GUNFIRE GREETED THEM AS THEY PENETRATED DEEPER. BUT THEY SOON REACHED THE NEXT BARRIER... AND IT SEEMED IMPASSABLE.

IT WAS A DEEP, BARBED WIRE-FILLED TRENCH, TOO WIDE TO LEAP. BOB KNEW IT WOULD TAKE AN HOUR TO CUT THROUGH IT BUT HE COULD THINK OF NO OTHER SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM.

THEIR LEADER'S INDECISION HAD MADE THE PATROL CARELESS. THE RATTLE OF A DISLODGED STONE REACHED THE EARS OF AN ENEMY MACHINE-GUN CREW...
ACHTUNG! LISTEN!

UNAWARE THAT THE ENEMY'S SUSPICIONS HAD BEEN AROUSED, BOB HUDSON HAD BEGUN TO CUT THROUGH THE BARRIER THE WAY HE LIKED TO TACKLE ALL DIFFICULTIES ... BY SHEER PHYSICAL FORCE.
BUT SURELY THIS WILL TAKE TOO LONG, SIR!
THERE'S NO OTHER WAY, SERGEANT... AND I'M NOT GOING BACK WITHOUT COMPLETING OUR TASK!

BUT SUDDENLY...
LOOK OUT! MACHINE-GUNS!
DUCK FOR IT, MATES!

THE WHOLE OF THAT SECTOR OF THE GERMAN FRONT CAME ALIVE. TRACER LACED THE DARKNESS AS THE SPANDAUS BURST INTO VIOLENT ACTION.
TRAVERSE THE WHOLE OF THAT RIDGE! AN ENGLANDER PATROL IS DOWN BY THE WIRE!

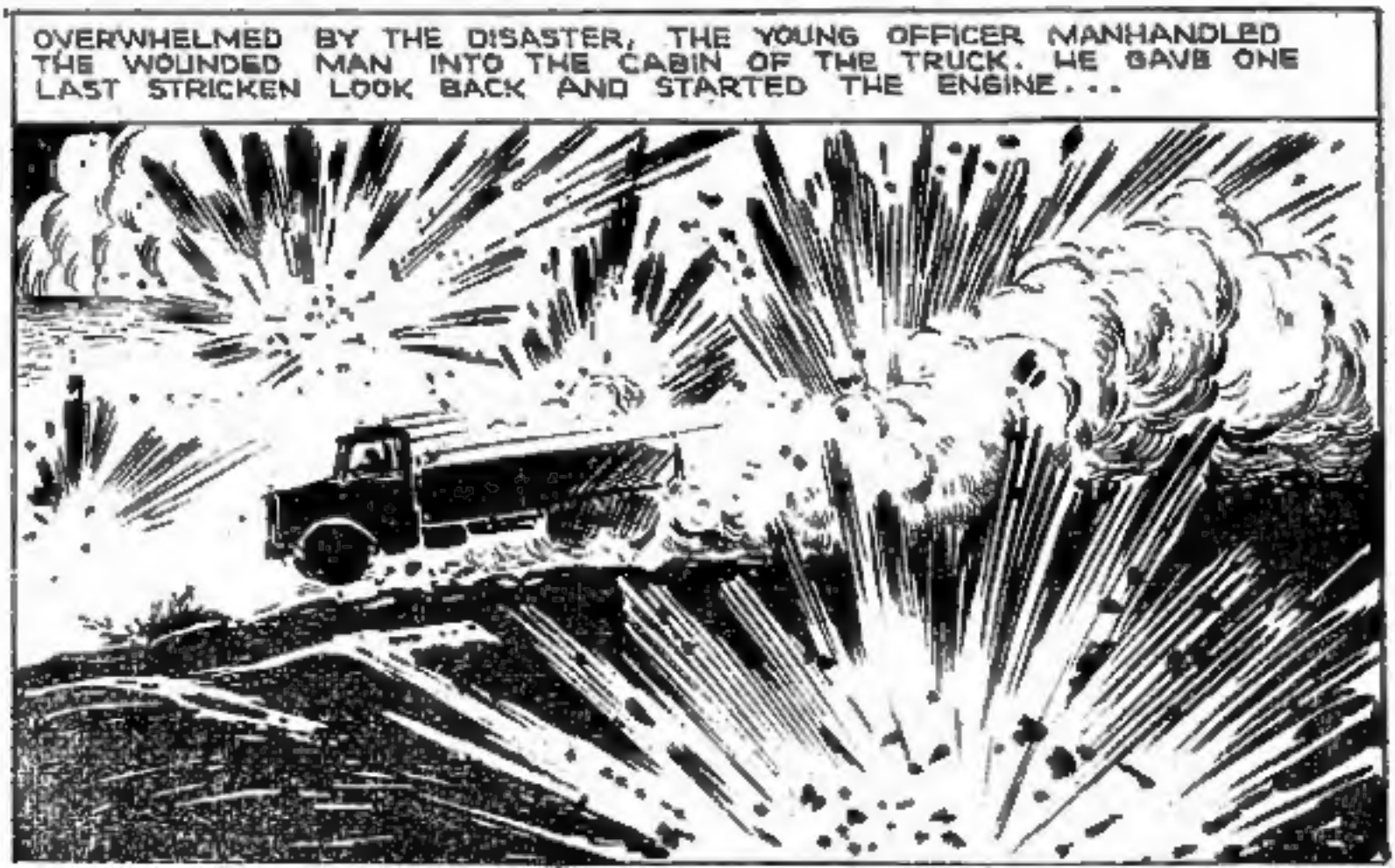
THE BRITISH PATROL WAS PINNED DOWN EVEN THOUGH THEY SENT A TORNADO OF LEAD LASHING INTO THE ENEMY POSITIONS...
WE'VE BUT ONE CHANCE... WHEN OUR OWN GUNS OPEN UP, THAT'LL QUIETEN JERRY AND GIVE US A CHANCE TO NIP AWAY.

BUT THE MEN OF THE PATROL SAW IN THE COMING BOMBARDMENT ONLY THEIR DOOM. FIRST ONE, THEN OTHERS, SCRAMBLED FROM COVER IN A BID FOR SAFETY...
COME BACK, YOU FOOLS! GET DOWN!

EVEN BOB'S BULL-LIKE ROAR WAS LOST IN THE MANIACAL CHATTER OF THE GERMAN GUNS. THEN THE BRITISH ARTILLERY OPENED UP... AND A NIGHTMARE WAS LET LOOSE.

# No Man's Land

BOB SEARCHED DESPAIRINGLY AMONGST THE SHAMBLES OF HIS PATROL BUT EVERY MAN BUT ONE, CORPORAL COLES, HAD BEEN KILLED.. HE HUMPED THE WOUNDED CORPORAL ON TO HIS BACK AND DESPITE THE UNRELENTING GUNFIRE, TRUDGED THROUGH THE INFERNO TOWARDS THE TRUCK.
ONLY US TWO LEFT ALIVE... IT CAN'T BE TRUE!


OVERWHELMED BY THE DISASTER, THE YOUNG OFFICER MANHANDLED THE WOUNDED MAN INTO THE CABIN OF THE TRUCK. HE GAVE ONE LAST STRICKEN LOOK BACK AND STARTED THE ENGINE...

TWISTING AND TURNING THROUGH THAT BELT OF FIRE BOB WON INTO THE CLEAR. BUT WITH THE FIRST STREAKS OF DAWN, HE KNEW A SUSPICION WHICH SOON GREW TO A CERTAINTY.

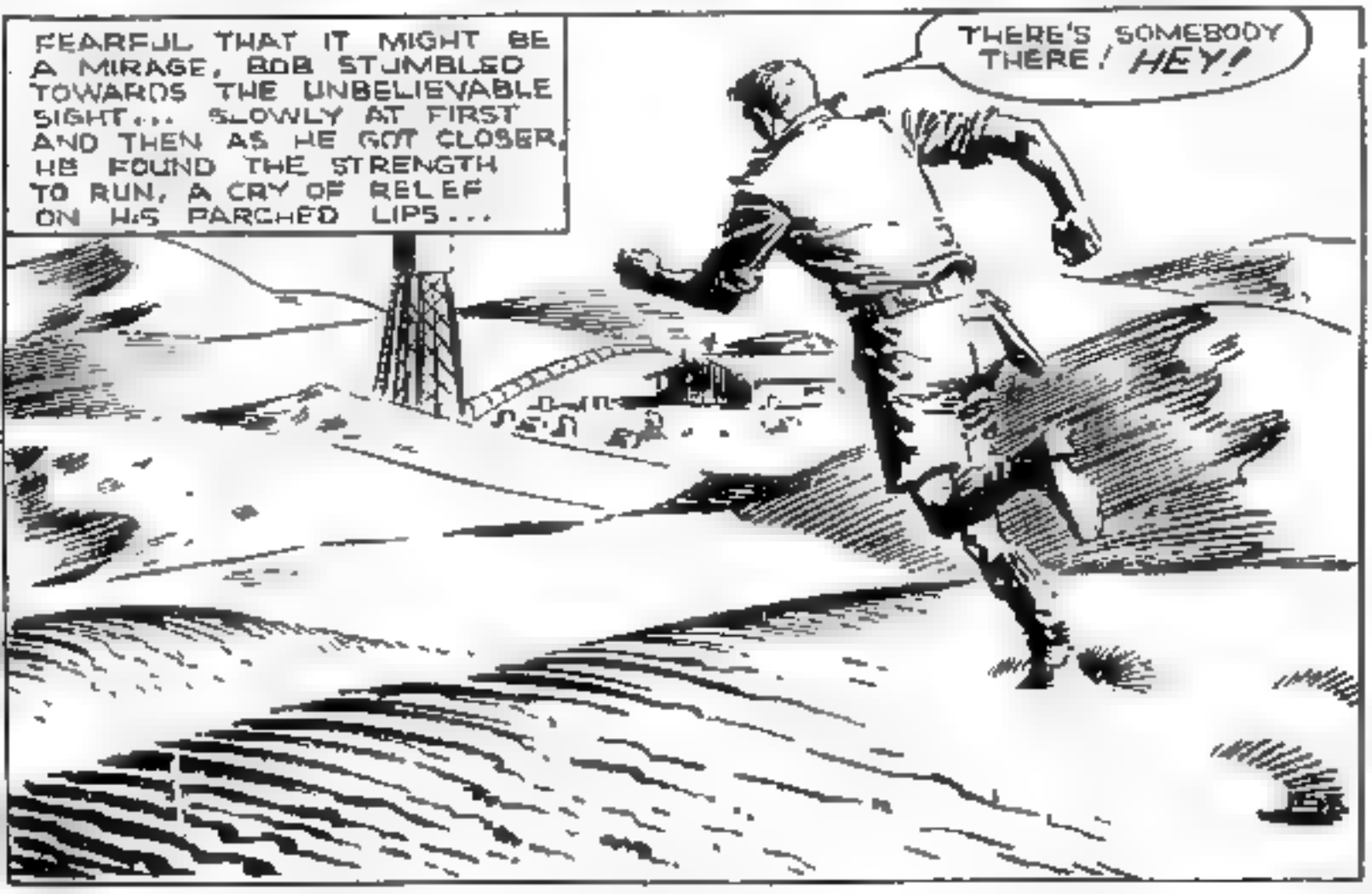
LOOKS LIKE WE'RE LOST, CORPORAL... JUST MILES AND MILES OF DARNED DESERT

HE TOOK A ROUGH BEARING AND DROVE ON. BUT THE WHOLE ILL-STARRED EXPEDITION WAS NOT YET FREE OF A REMORSELESS FATE. THE TRUCK'S FRONT WHEEL STRUCK THE EDGE OF A MINEFIELD LEFT UNCLEARED FROM SOME EARLIER CAMPAIGN.

THE WHEEL AND AXLE WERE SHATTERED, FOR BOB HUDSON, THE PROBLEM WAS NOW MERELY ONE OF PHYSICAL EFFORT. THAT WAS SOMETHING HE COULD UNDERSTAND AND THANKS TO A SUPERB PHYSIQUE, HE COULD MEET.
THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR IT, CORPORAL... WE'LL HAVE TO FOOTSLOG IT!

BUT THE SUN ROSE REMORSELESSLY INTO THE BRASSY SKY, ITS SEARING RAYS BEATING ON THEIR UNPROTECTED HEADS. THEIR LAST DROP OF WATER HAD BEEN DRUNK AND NO SIGN OF LIFE GREETED THEIR STINGING EYES AS EACH BARREN RIDGE DISCLOSED NOTHING BUT MORE DESOLATE EMPTY MILES.

BY MIDDAY, CORPORAL COLES HAD TO BE CARRIED. AND IN THE AFTERNOON HE WAS BORDERING ON DELIRIUM. BOB FOUND THE WOUNDED MAN A NARROW STRIP OF SHADE AND EASED HIS OWN ACHING BACK. AS HE DID SO HE CAUGHT SIGHT OF A SQUARE DARK OBJECT STANDING UP FROM THE DESERT.
GLORY BE! AM I SEEING THINGS... OR IS THAT A WATER TOWER?


FEARFUL THAT IT MIGHT BE A MIRAGE, BOB STUMBLED TOWARDS THE UNBELIEVABLE SIGHT... SLOWLY AT FIRST AND THEN AS HE GOT CLOSER, HE FOUND THE STRENGTH TO RUN, A CRY OF RELEF ON HIS PARCHED LIPS...
THERE'S SOMEBODY THERE! HEY!

BUT THE HOARSE SHOUT WAS IGNORED BY THAT DISTANT FIGURE AND WHEN BOB REACHED THE SPOT PANTING WITH THE EFFORT, HE LEARNED THE FANTASTIC REASON WHY.
WHAT THE BLAZES! IT'S A DUMMY!
WITH A PANGLE OF FEAR BOB THOUGHT HE WAS GOING DELIRIOUS FOR THE "SOLDIER" WAS NOTHING BUT A JACKET DRAPED OVER A WIRE FRAME

BOB'S EYES LIFTED TO THE WATER TOWER... ONLY TO STARE AS IF IN TRUTH HE HAD GONE MAD. FOR THE TANK WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOLID IRON NOW APPEARED TO FLAP AND RIPPLE.
AM I STARK STARING MAD. IT'S CANVAS!

BOB STARED AROUND HIM IN BLACK DISILLUSIONMENT HE TOOK IN THE ARMY HUTS THE MOUNDS OF SUPPLIES THE LONG LINE OF PETROL DRUMS THAT STRETCHED LIKE A PIPELINE.. BUT A DUMMY PIPELINE.
THE WHOLE PLACE IS A FAKE!

THE YOUNG LEUTENANT COULD NOT BRING HIMSELF TO THINK OF A REASON FOR IT ALL HE KNEW ONLY AN EMPTY DESPAIRING RAGE... A BITTER HELPLESS FUTILITY.

BUT THE MOOD SOON PASSED. THE OLD STUBBORN WILL TO SURVIVE REASSERTED ITSELF. BOB FORCED HIS ACHING LIMBS UP THE LADDER OF THE DUMMY WATER TOWER.

THIS DARN THING MIGHT BE A PHONEY BUT IT SHOULD MAKE A GOOD LOOK-OUT.

FOR MANY MINUTES HIS ACHING EYES SEARCHED THE SHIMMERING DISTANCES FOR SIGNS OF MOVEMENT. THEN A SLOW GASP OF WONDER ESCAPED HIM...

BY ALL THAT'S WONDERFUL... WHEEL DUST... TRUCKS!

WHETHER THEY WERE ENEMY VEHICLES OR FRIENDLY MADE LITTLE DIFFERENCE AT THAT DESPERATE MOMENT. HE MUST ATTRACT ATTENTION. HIS EYE FELL ON THE FLAPPING CANVAS AND HE WHIPPED OUT HIS CIGARETTE LIGHTER...

A SIGNAL FIRE... THAT'S WHAT I NEED!

THE CANVAS SMOKED BLACKLY FOR SEVERAL MINUTES AND THE DUST CLOUD HEADED FOR THE ENCAMPMENT. SOON BOB WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE TRUCKS AS FRIENDLY...

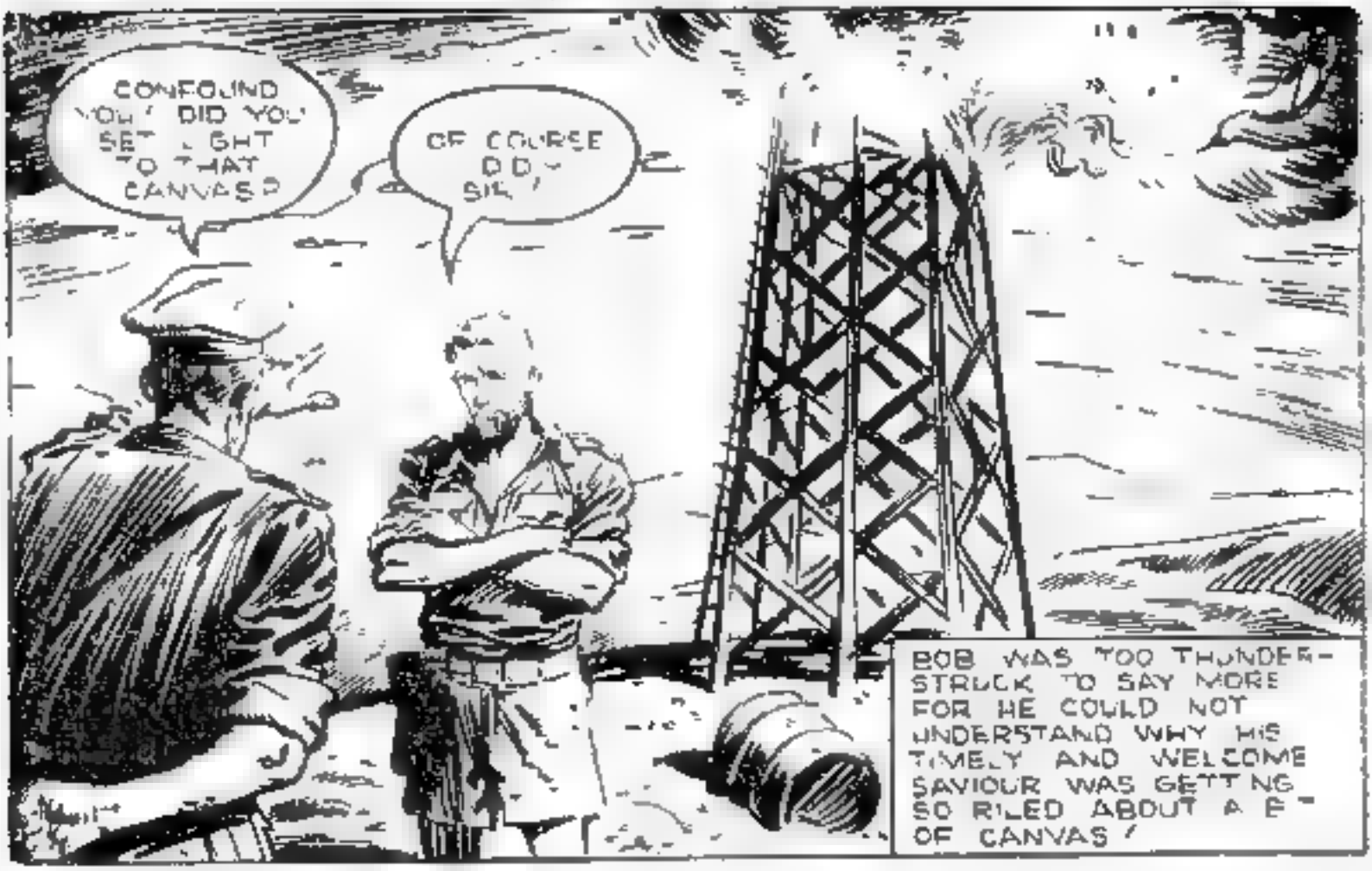
THANK HEAVENS! THEY'RE OURS!

THE TRUCKS GROUND TO A HALT AND THE LANKY FIGURE OF A BRITISH MAJOR JUMPED DOWN AND STRODE TOWARDS BOB... NOT WITH THE EXPECTED GRIN OF A RESCUER BUT WITH A FACE LIKE THUNDER...

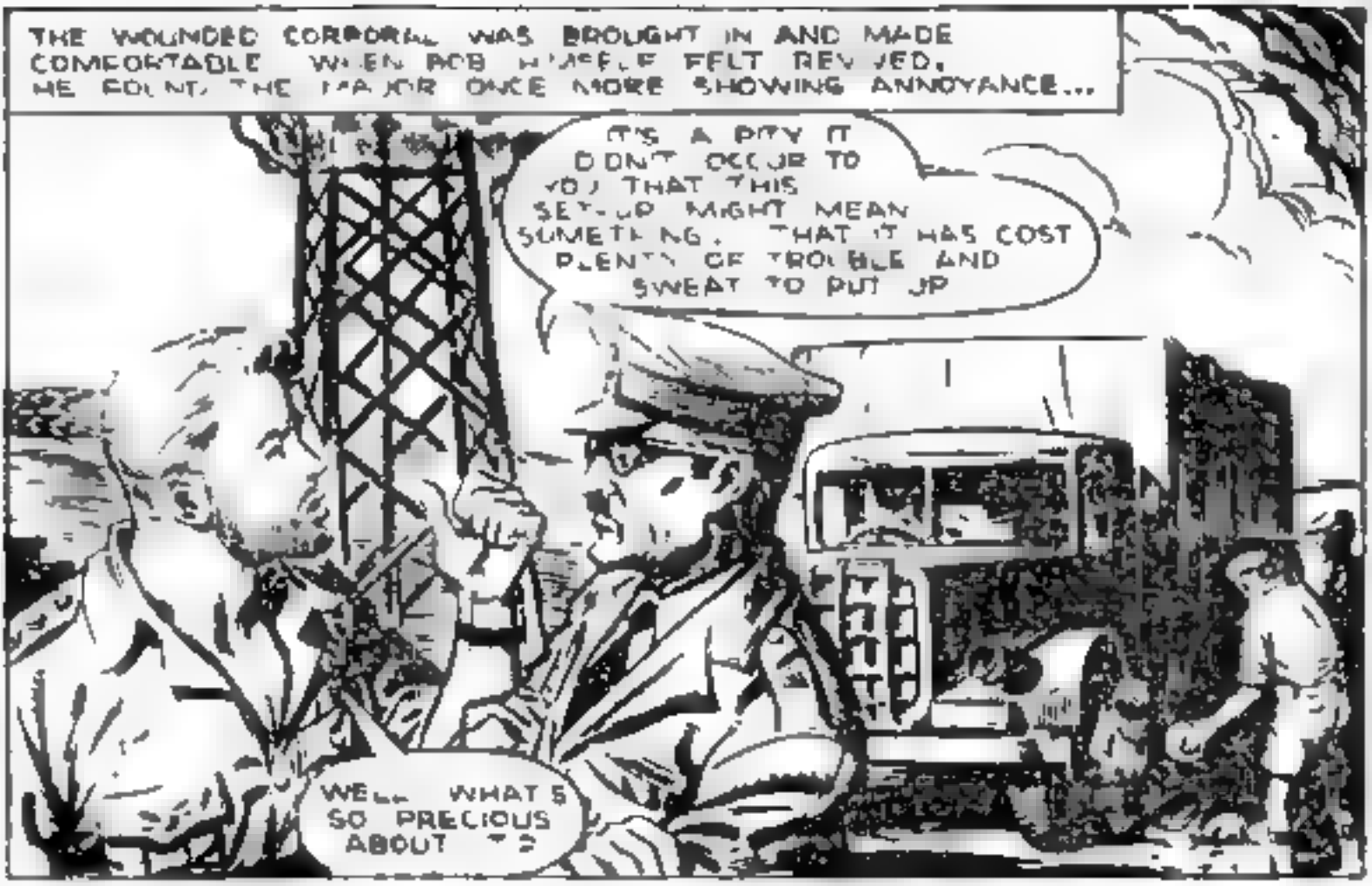
HEY, YOU! WHAT THE DEVIL D'YOU MEAN BY IT?

10

B-BY WHAT?


CONFOUND YOU! DID YOU SET A LIGHT TO THAT CANVAS?
OF COURSE DID, SIR!
BOB WAS TOO THUNDER-STRUCK TO SAY MORE FOR HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY HIS TIMELY AND WELCOME SAVIOUR WAS GETTING SO RILED ABOUT A BIT OF CANVAS!

SENSING THE YOUNG OFFICER'S CONDITION THE NEWCOMER MODIFIED HIS ACID TONE...
MY NAME'S STARK OF THE CAMOUFLAGE CORPS YOU LOOK IN TROUBLE.
JUST THIRSTY ... AND LOST THERE'S A WOUNDED MAN ... HALF A MILE BACK, UNDER A ROCK


THE WOUNDED CORPORAL WAS BROUGHT IN AND MADE COMFORTABLE WHEN BOB HASELE FELT REVIVED, HE FOUND THE MAJOR ONCE MORE SHOWING ANNOYANCE...
IT'S A PITY IT DIDN'T OCCUR TO YOU THAT THIS SET-UP MIGHT MEAN SOMETHING. THAT IT HAS COST PLENTY OF TROUBLE AND SWEAT TO PUT UP
WELL WHAT'S SO PRECIOUS ABOUT IT?

THE TWO MEN FACED UP TO EACH OTHER ANGRILY...
PLENTY! THIS IS A DECOY PIPELINE AND SUPPLIES DUMP ITS JOB IS TO ATTRACT ENEMY BOMBING AWAY FROM THE REAL DUMP SIX MILES TO THE NORTH DOES THAT MAKE SENSE?
LOOK, I HAD A WOUNDED MAN TO THINK OF. WE WERE LOST... PARCHED WAS I TO STOP AND FIGURE OUT WHAT ALL THIS CRAZY DUMP WAS ABOUT?

BUT AS BOB AND THE WOUNDED CORPORAL WERE BEING TAKEN AWAY, THE SHARP-TONGUED MAJOR HAD THE LAST WORD... AND IT HURT.
IF YOU HAD LOOKED AROUND, YOU WOULD HAVE FOUND A TELEPHONE INSTALLED IN ONE OF THE HUTS YOU COULD HAVE RUNG BASE EASY AS WINK ,IT JUST WANTED PLAIN ORDINARY WITS, LIEUTENANT!

WITH A SNORT, BOB CLIMBED ABOARD AND FACED THE LAST LAP OF THAT WHOLE INGLORIOUS EPISODE.
WITS! USE YOUR BRAINS! THAT'S WHAT THE COLONEL'S ALWAYS ON AT ME ABOUT THAT'S FINE... BUT I CAN'T STAND A CAMOUFLAGE CRANK MAKING ME LOOK A FOOL!

TWO DAYS LATER, WHEN BOB'S REPORT CAME BACK FROM BRIGADE HEADQUARTERS, COLONEL BOWLEY WAS OBLIGED TO HAVE THE YOUNG OFFICER IN.
... AND ABOUT THAT WIRED TRENCH, HUDSON, THE BRIGADIER SAYS, WHY D'DN'T YOU THINK TO USE THE SIDE FLAP OF YOUR TRUCK TO CROSS IT?

BOB HUDSON LISTENED, SCARLET-FACED, TO THE COLONEL'S FINAL WORDS...
PHYSICALLY, HUDSON, YOU'RE THE FINEST TYPE OF FIGHTING SOLDIER. BUT YOU'VE GOT TO REALISE THAT PROPER THOUGHT PLAYS A PART, TOO ... IN SURMOUNTING OBSTACLES, IN OUTWITTING THE ENEMY AND SO ON...

# Chapter 2. MAN of DECEPTION

THE FOLLOWING DAYS FOR BOB WERE THE GLOOMIEST HE COULD REMEMBER. ESSENTIALLY A MAN OF ACTION HE ITCHED TO FORGET HIS SHAME IN THE BLAZE OF BATTLE. BUT IT WAS THE LULL THAT CAME IN THE DESERT WAR AT THE TURN OF 1942. ONE MORNING, HOWEVER...

I KNOW YOU HATE KICKING YOUR HEELS, HUDSON. THINK I'VE GOT A LITTLE JOB YOU'D LIKE. IT SEEMS A WORKING PARTY OF SIXTY MEN IS WANTED ON THE COAST SOMETHING HUSH-HUSH. NOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO IN CHARGE OF THE PARTY?

VERY MUCH, SIR!

BY NIGHTFALL, BOB HAD COLLECTED THE MEN, THEIR RATIONS FOR TWENTY-FOUR HOURS, AND HAD STARTED OFF IN TRUCKS FOR THE RENDEZVOUS POINT EIGHTY MILES BEHIND THEIR LINES.

THEY MADE ONE STOP DURING THE NIGHT AND BY THE COLD LIGHT OF DAWN THEY SAW THE VEHICLES THEY WERE TO MEET. SOON, BOB WAS BEING GREETED BY THE LIEUTENANT IN CHARGE...
KIMBERS IS THE NAME.
MINE'S HUDSON ANY IDEA WHAT ALL THIS IS ABOUT?
NOT THE SLIGHTEST, OLD BOY!
I'VE GOT TWENTY TRUCKS FULL OF OLD JUNK BUT DON'T ASK ME WHAT FOR!
WELL, LET'S GET CRACKING AND MAYBE WE'LL FIND OUT

LATER THAT DAY, THEY REACHED THEIR DESTINATION — A TENTED ENCAMPMENT HARD BY THE BLUE SEA. AS THEY CHURNED TO A HALT A BRISK FIGURE HURRIED TOWARDS THEM... AND BOB STARED WITH DAWNING REGOGNITION.
WELL I'LL BE HANGED! IT'S THAT CAMOUFLAGE CRANK!
MAJOR STARK SHARED BOB'S SURPRISE BUT IT DID NOT SIDETRACK HIM FROM AN EAGER INSPECTION OF THE NEW SUPPLIES.
THESE ROLLS OF CANVAS ARE EXCELLENT WHERE'S THE TIMBER... THE POLES I ASKED FOR?
IN THE OTHER TRUCKS.
HE'S AS EXCITED AS A KID. WHAT'S HIS HARE-BRAINED SCHEME THIS TIME?

WHEN THE TRUCKS HAD BEEN UNLOADED, MAJOR STARK LED BOB AND KIMBERS TO A RIDGE OVERLOOKING THE SEA. THE TWO YOUNG OFFICERS STARED BEFORE THEM IN SURPRISE..
SEE ALL THAT DIGGING OUT... THOSE CONCRETE POSTS STICKING OUT OF THE WATER? IT'S A HALF-FINISHED HARBOUR... THE WORK OF ITALIAN ENGINEERS. THEY HAD TO ABANDON IT WHEN WE PUSHED ROMMEL BACK.

SO WE'RE GOING TO FINISH WHAT THE ITALIANS STARTED?
NOT QUITE. WE'RE GOING TO MAKE IT *SEEM* THAT WE'VE FINISHED IT. WE ARE GOING TO MAKE THIS PLACE LOOK THE REAL THING *AND WE'LL DO IT WITH CAMOUFLAGE.*

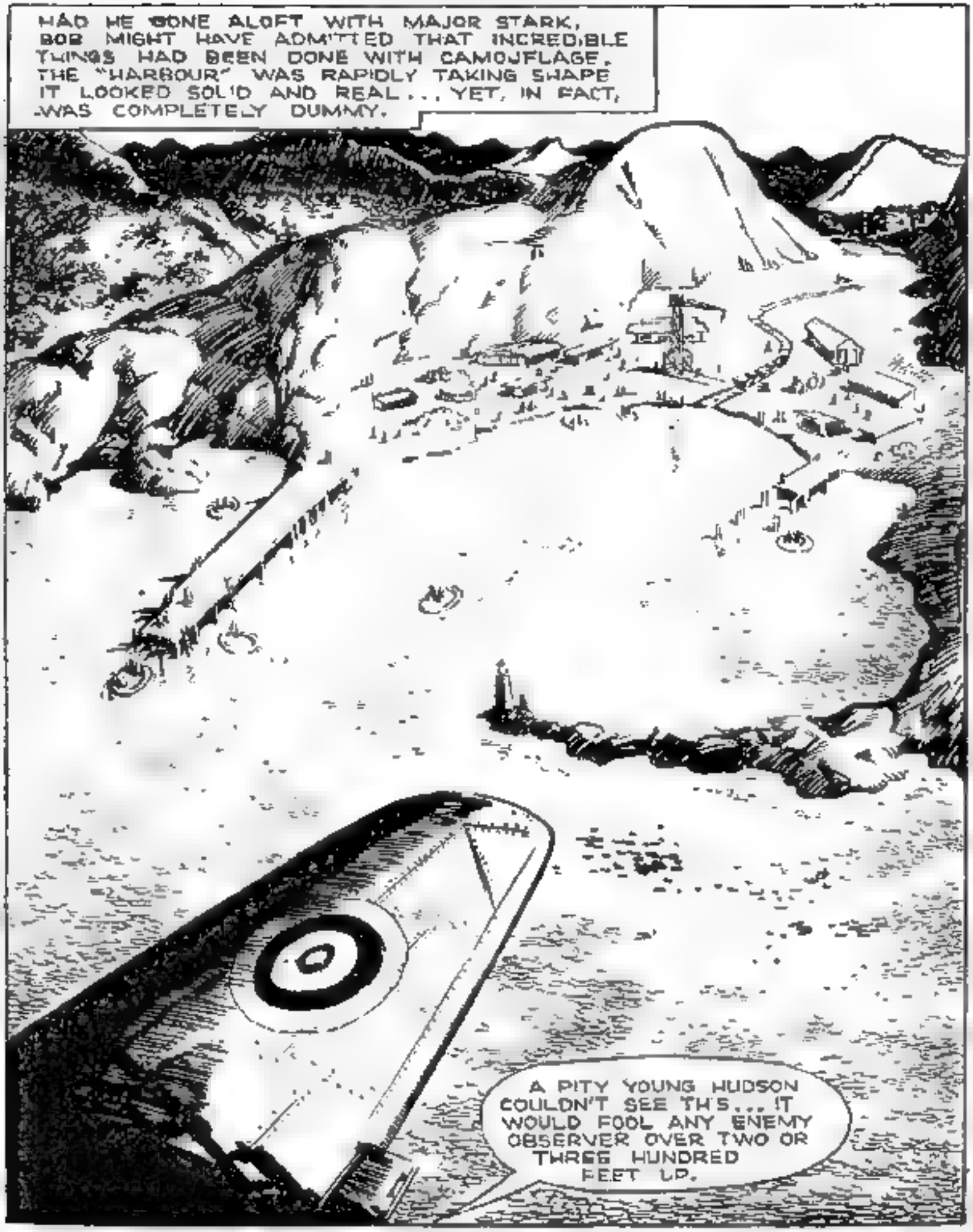
BOB SWUNG ROUND WITH A SNORT OF DERISION.
CAMOUFLAGE THE LOT? YOU'LL NEVER DO IT! JERRY ISN'T SO DUMB AS ALL THAT!
HE IS FROM THE A.R. LIEUTENANT. WE'VE LEARNED A GOOD DEAL ON HOW TO BLUFF GERMAN RECCE PLANES... YOU'LL SEE!

WORK WAS BEGUN AND IN THE NEXT FEW DAYS THE CONCRETE PILES WERE COVERED OVER WITH A "DECKING" OF STRETCHED AND PAINTED CANVAS. TO BOB'S JAUNDICED EYE IT LOOKED ABSURD... FLAPPING IN THE SEA BREEZE.
YOU WON'T WIN THE WAR WITH BITS OF STRING AND CANVAS, MAJOR YOU'VE GOT TO GO N AND FIGHT!
THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY OF FIGHTING' YOU'VE GOT A LOT TO LEARN, HUDSON MEANTIME, YOU CAN GET ASHORE AND START MOVING YOUR TRUCKS AROUND.

MOVE MY TRUCKS AROUND? WHAT FOR?
TO RAISE A DUST, OF COURSE. TO DRAW THE ENEMY'S ATTENTION TO THIS PART OF THE COAST. ALL THESE PREPARATIONS WOULD BE POINTLESS OTHERWISE.

WITH A SHRUG, BOB TOOK HIMSELF ASHORE AND FOUND KIMBERS. SOON THEIR TRUCKS WERE CIRCLING AIMLESSLY...
THIS ISN'T SOLDIERING... I WANT ACTION, FIGHTING!

BOB'S LAST FATAL PATROL STILL HAUNTED HIS MEMORY LIKE A BAD DREAM. PERHAPS IN ACTION HE COULD FORGET IT — AND MAKE AMENDS. A WEEK LATER, HE REACHED THE END OF HIS PATIENCE...
I'VE LAID ON A TRIAL AIR RECCE OF THE HARBOUR. YOU'D BETTER COME, TOO. MAYBE YOU'LL LEARN THAT CAMOUFLAGE ISN'T SUCH A WASTE OF TIME.
NO, THANK YOU! I THINK THE WHOLE THING'S FUTILE. HOW SOON CAN I TAKE MY MEN BACK?


HAD HE GONE ALOFT WITH MAJOR STARK, BOB MIGHT HAVE ADMITTED THAT INCREDIBLE THINGS HAD BEEN DONE WITH CAMOUFLAGE. THE "HARBOUR" WAS RAPIDLY TAKING SHAPE IT LOOKED SOLID AND REAL... YET, IN FACT, WAS COMPLETELY DUMMY.
A PITY YOUNG HUDSON COULDN'T SEE THIS... IT WOULD FOOL ANY ENEMY OBSERVER OVER TWO OR THREE HUNDRED FEET UP.

SO BOB REMAINED UNCONVINCED. TO HIM THE FUTILE DAYS SEEMED TO DRAG, UNTIL ONE MORNING...
LOOK, SIR... A MOVEMENT ACROSS THE BAY!
BY HEAVENS... GERMANS!
IT'S A RAID!

BOB HUDSON SWUNG ROUND EXCITEDLY, THE DESIRE FOR ACTION SPARKING IN HIS EYES...
BY GLORY! THIS IS WHAT MY MEN AND I NEED! WE'RE GETTING RUSTY LYING AROUND HERE, MAJOR!
NOT SO FAST, HUDSON! YOU DON'T KNOW THEIR NUMBERS.

BUT BOB WAS AFIRE WITH DETERMINATION...
DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT SIR I'LL TAKE A BUNCH OF MY LADS WE'LL OUT-FLANK AND SURPRISE THOSE SNOOPERS
H'MM! THAT'S JUST WHAT THEY ARE.. SNOOPERS VERY WELL, HUDSON, GET YOUR MEN
FOR THE FIRST TIME MAJOR STARK WAS AWARE OF A FEELING OF APPROVAL FOR THE BRASH YOUNG OFFICER. FOR THE ENEMY RECONNAISSANCE PARTY MUST BE DESTROYED... AND HUDSON SEEMED TO BE THE MAN TO DO IT.

WITHIN MINUTES, BOB WAS LEADING AN ARMED PATROL DOWN ON TO THE BEACH. THEY MOVED FAST, DARTING FROM COVER TO COVER.

AT A POINT OUT OF SIGHT OF THE INTRUDERS, THEY SCALED THE CLIFF TO TAKE THEM IN THE REAR. IT WAS FROM THAT VANTAGE POINT, THEY SAW A SLIM BLACK SHAPE FLOATING OUT TO SEA.
LOOK! A U-BOAT! THEY MUST HAVE COME IN IT. ABOUT THIRTY OF THE BLIGHTERS EH, SERGEANT?
A RATIO OF THREE TO TWO... IN THEIR FAVOUR. SUITS US SIR

WHEN HIS MEN WERE ALL IN POSITION, BOB GAVE THE ORDER TO FIRE... AND A STACCATO FUSILLADE DISTURBED THE STILLNESS. SEVERAL OF THE ENEMY WERE CUT DOWN IMMEDIATELY...

THE GERMANS WERE QUICK TO RETURN THE FIRE BUT WITHOUT ANY SUCCESS ... UNTIL THE GERMAN U-BOAT'S GUN JOINED IN WITH ITS PECULIAR FLAT BARK ..
BACK INTO COVER.. BEHIND THE ROCKS!
PANTING HEAVILY, MAJOR STARK JOINED BOB. THERE WAS A LULL IN THE FIRING AND A MOCKING VOICE ROSE FROM THE BOULDERS BELOW, SPEAKING IN PRECISE ENGLISH...
ENGLANDER FOOLS! WE HAVE DISCOVERED YOUR STUPID SECRET. THE HARBOUR IS A DECEPTION!
BAD LUCK, MAJOR!
MAJOR STARK TURNED TO BOB VEHEMENTLY...
IT'S NO JOKE, HUDSON. THEY MUST NOT ESCAPE WITH THE INFORMATION... THAT IS VITAL!
VERY WELL, MAJOR... THIS, AT LEAST IS A JOB A STUPID INFANTRYMAN CAN HANDLE.

EVEN AS THE CAMOUFLAGE OFFICER GLARED AT THE LIEUTENANT FOR HIS BITING REMARK THE GERMANS BROKE COVER AND DASHED FOR THEIR RUBBER BOATS ...
AIM FOR THOSE IN THE BOATS FIRST... NOT ONE OF 'EM MUST GET AWAY!

BOBS MEN RACED ACROSS THE STRETCH OF BEACH, WADING INTO THE WATER TO GET TO CLOSE QUARTERS...
UGH!

BOB WAS IN HIS ELEMENT THE ISSUE CLEAR-CUT . HE SIMPLY HAD TO HIT HARDER AND FASTER THAN THE OTHER MAN. IF ONLY ALL PROBLEMS OF LEADERSHIP WERE AS SIMPLE !

THE FEROCITY OF THE BRITISH SOLDIERS ATTACK MADE UP FOR THEIR LACK OF NUMBERS AND THE CRESTFALLEN ENEMY WERE SOON DISARMED AND PRODDED SHOREWARD
GRAB ANYBODY WHO TRIES TO MAKE A BREAK FOR IT!

BOB EYED MAJOR STARK AGGRESSIVELY AS HE CAME ASHORE, FOR THE SENIOR OFFICER SEEMED TO HAVE TAKEN NO PART IN THE MÊLÉE.
YOU CAN SAFELY LEAVE THE FIGHTING TO US, MAJOR!
I FOUGHT, TOO, HUDSON BUT WITH WEAPONS YOU DON'T SEEM TO RECOGNISE

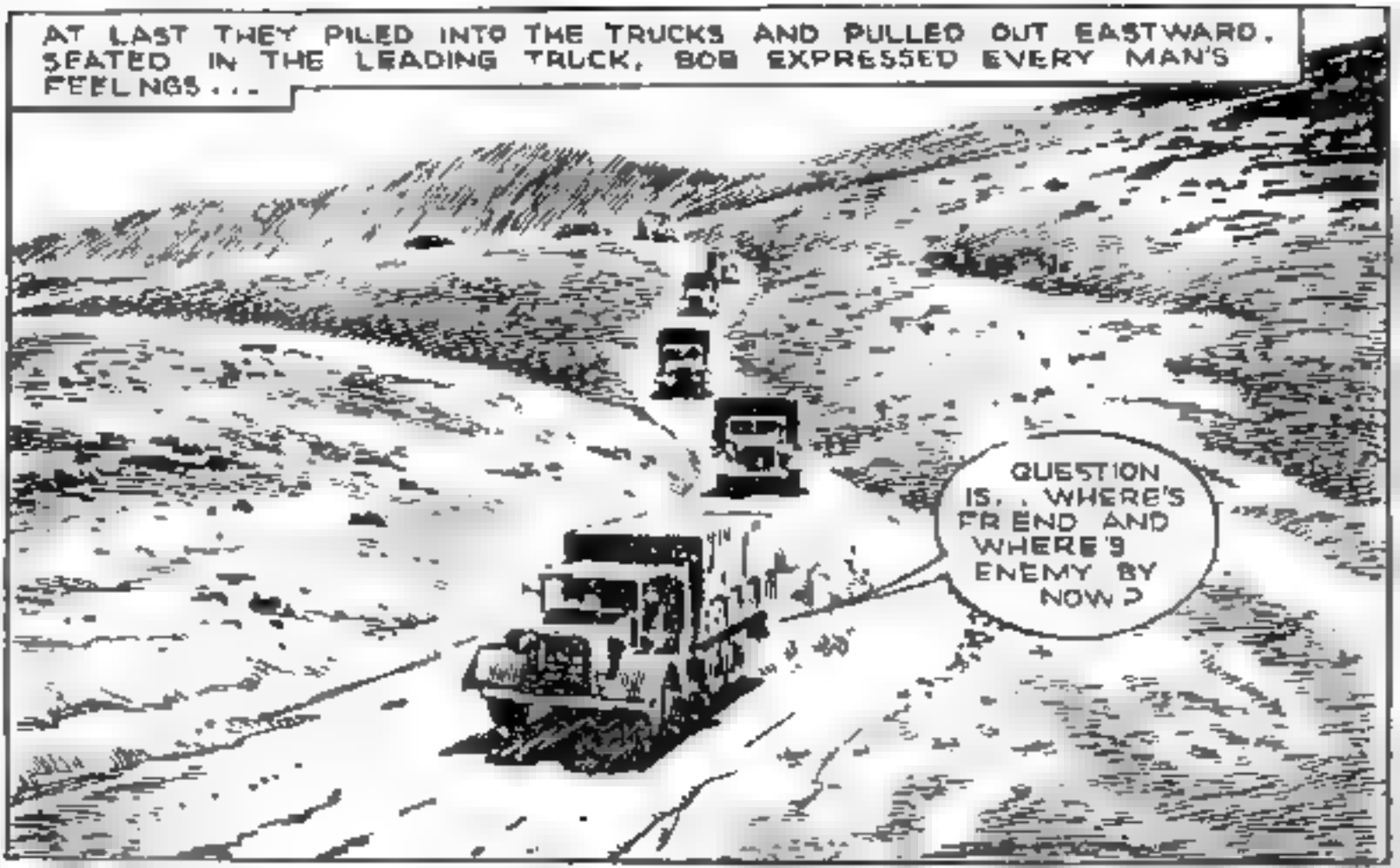
THEY RETURNED TO THE HARBOUR BASE WHERE A NEWLY ARRIVED SIGNAL AWAITED MAJOR STARK. HIS FACE WAS STRAINED WITH DISMAY AND DISAPPOINTMENT AS HE READ IT.
ROMMEL'S BROKEN LOOSE! HE'S LAUNCHED A LIGHTNING ATTACK! ALREADY HE HAS SWEPT THROUGH THE BRITISH LINES.

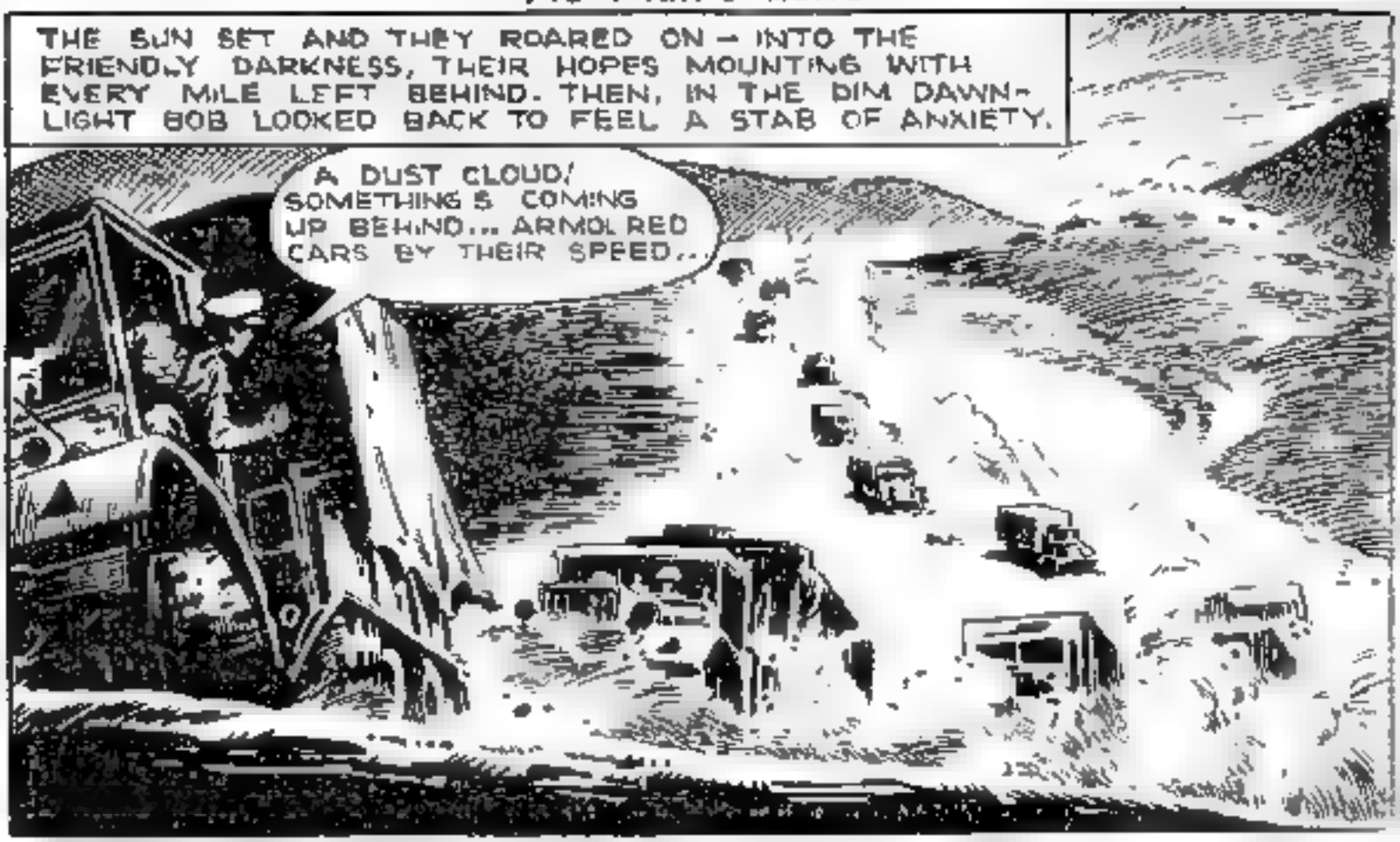
A FEW MOMENTS LATER THERE WAS WORSE TO COME...
MESSAGE FROM BATTALION HEADQUARTERS, SIR GERMAN ARMOURED UNITS HAVE GOT PAST OUR REAR
WE'RE CUT OFF, BY HEAVENS!
WE'LL HAVE TO RUN FOR IT BEFORE JERRY GETS HERE!

BOB AND KIMBERS TURNED HURRIEDLY TOWARDS THE DOOR BUT A HARSH, COMMANDING VOICE PULLED THEM TO A HALT.
NO ONE IS LEAVING UNTIL ALL TRACE OF OUR CAMOUFLAGE WORK HAS BEEN OBLITERATED... DESTROYED.
WHAT! STAY BEHIND FOR A COLLECTION OF STRING AND CANVAS? I'VE GOT MY MEN'S LIVES TO THINK OF!

THERE WAS A GRIM SET TO STARK'S JAW...
YOU STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND, HUDSON. THE GERMANS MUST NOT LEARN HOW ADVANCED OUR CAMOUFLAGE HAS BECOME. EVERYTHING MUST BE DESTROYED... OR MONTHS OF PATIENT INGENUITY WILL BE LAID BARE TO THE ENEMY MY ORDER STANDS!

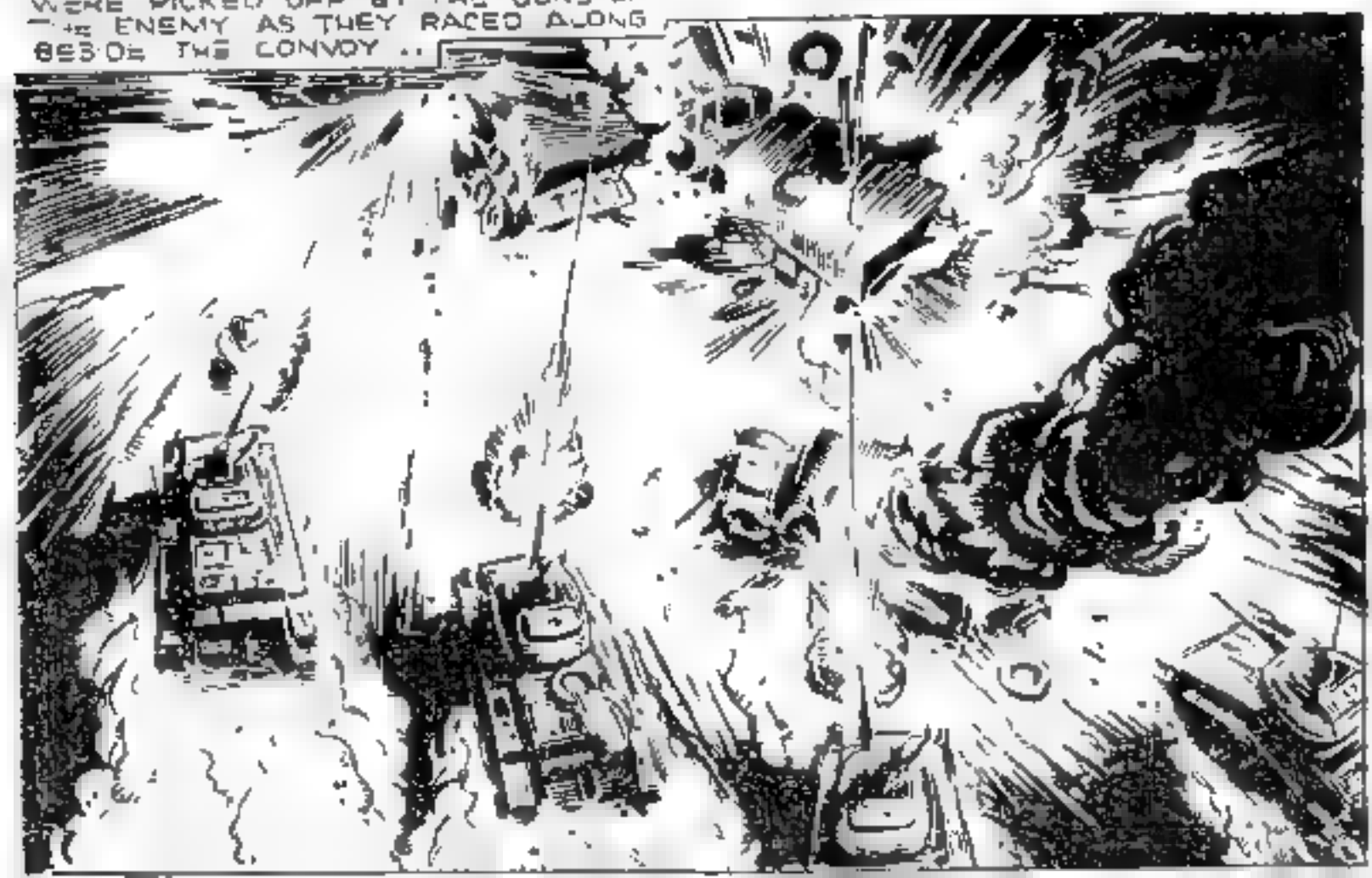
THE MEN SET ABOUT DESTROYING THE CAMOUFLAGE HALF MUTINOUSLY, FOR THEY AND BOB HUDSON COULD IMAGINE THE MIGHT OF ROMMEL'S ARMOUR SWEEPING BETWEEN THEM AND FREEDOM...
THIS IS PRECIOUS TIME WASTED, MAJOR... MAYBE OUR LIVES, TOO!
I'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE THAT RISK, HUDSON!
YOU'LL TAKE THE RISK... THAT'S RICH!

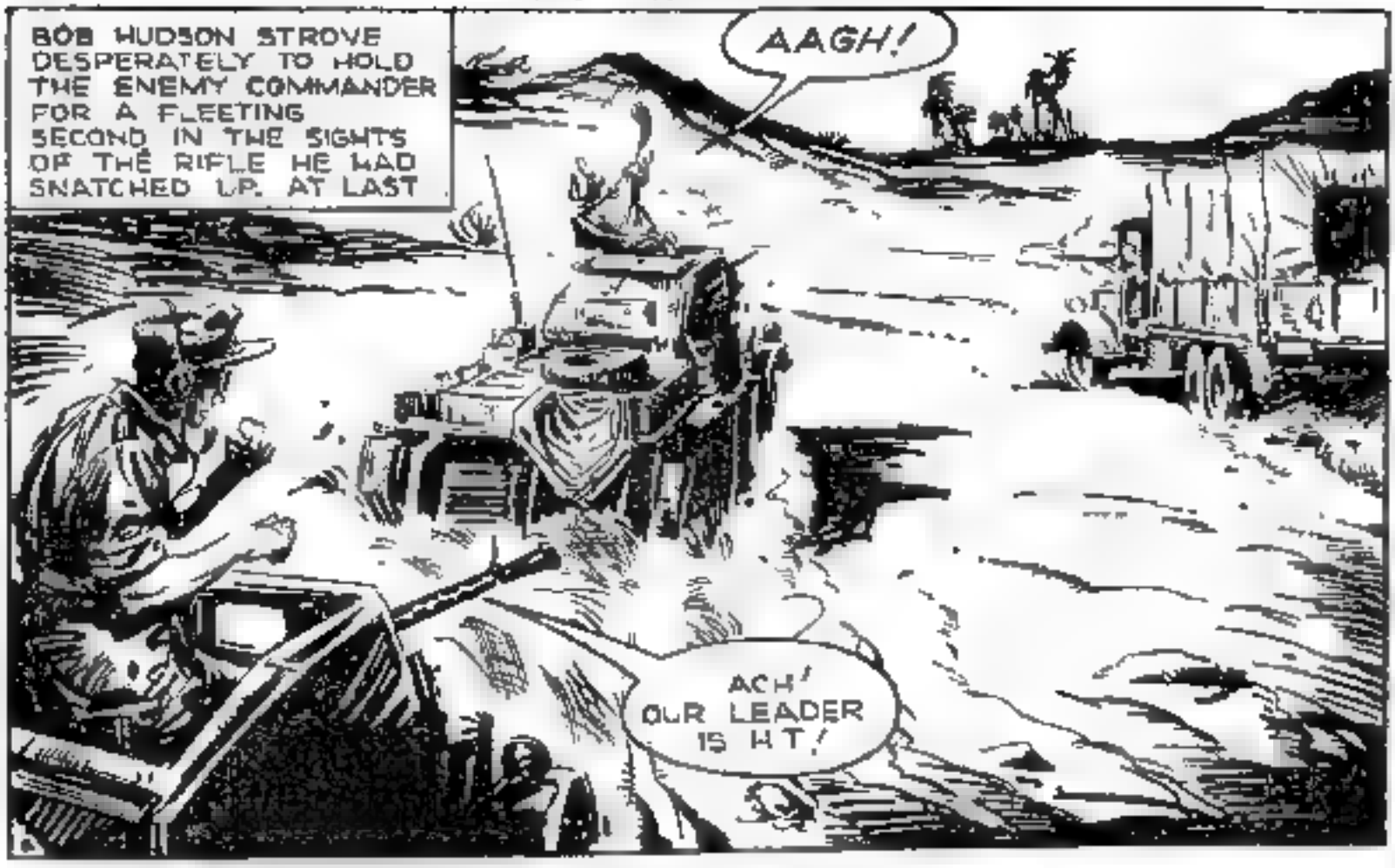

AT LAST THEY PILED INTO THE TRUCKS AND PULLED OUT EASTWARD. SEATED IN THE LEADING TRUCK, BOB EXPRESSED EVERY MAN'S FEELINGS...
QUESTION IS... WHERE'S FRIEND AND WHERE'S ENEMY BY NOW?

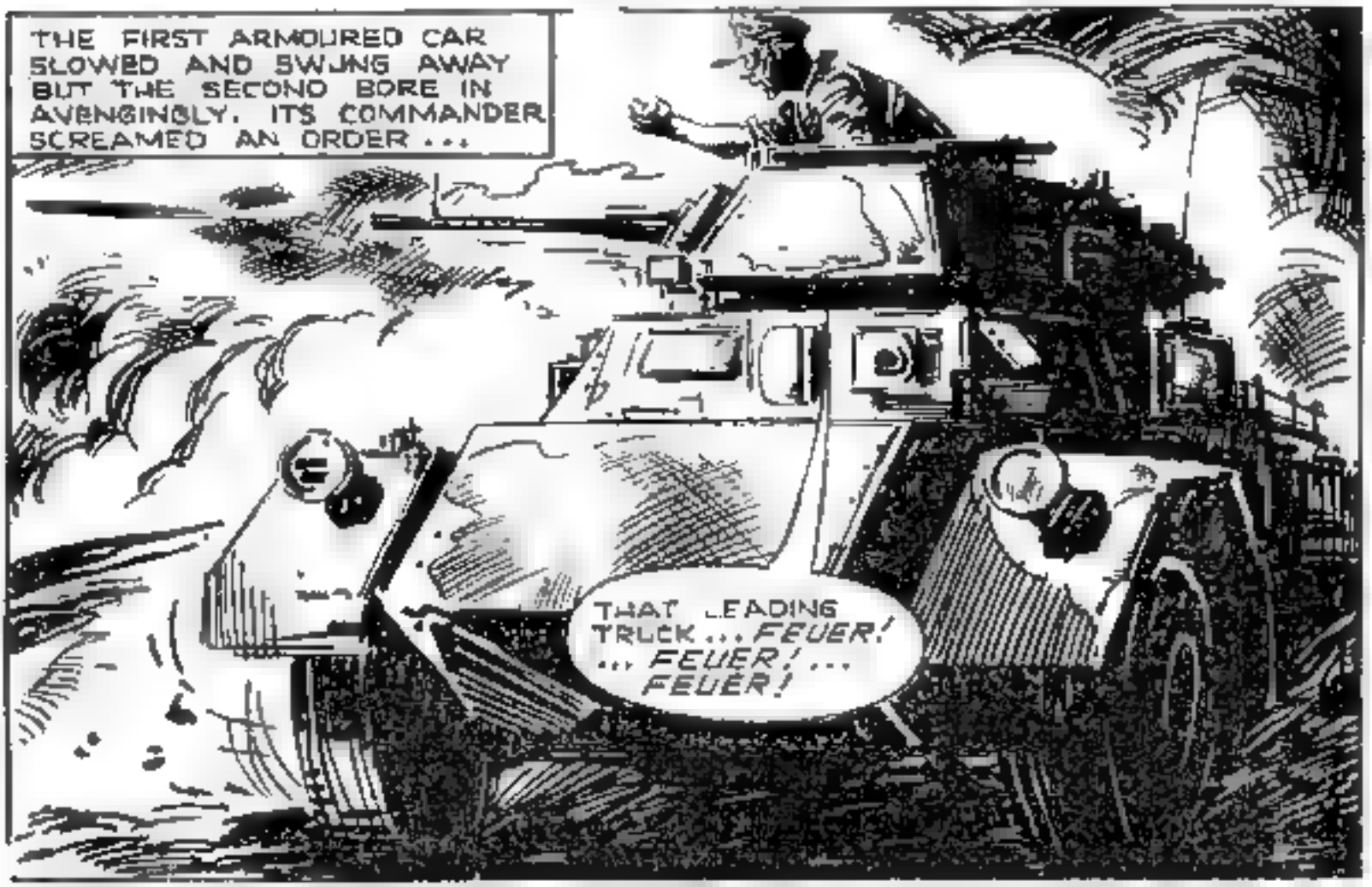

THE SUN SET AND THEY ROARED ON — INTO THE FRIENDLY DARKNESS, THEIR HOPES MOUNTING WITH EVERY MILE LEFT BEHIND. THEN, IN THE DIM DAWN-LIGHT BOB LOOKED BACK TO FEEL A STAB OF ANXIETY.
A DUST CLOUD! SOMETHING'S COMING UP BEHIND... ARMOURED CARS BY THEIR SPEED...

AS THE SUN ROSE INTO THE CLOUDLESS SKY, THE DISTANT VEHICLES BECAME RECOGNISABLE FOR WHAT THEY WERE... GERMAN ARMOURED CARS. LIKE VULTURES, THEY CLOSED ON THE HELPLESS REAR OF THE CONVOY...
WE'VE HAD IT! THEY'VE GOT US COLD!

WARNED BY THE ALARMED YELLS OF THE SOLDIERS THEY CARRIED, THE DRIVERS SENT THE TRUCKS BOUNDING AT TOP SPEED OVER THE BROKEN GROUND. BUT TO NO AVAIL...
THEY'RE ON US! WE HAVEN'T A CHANCE!


ONE AFTER ANOTHER THE TRUCKS WERE PICKED OFF BY THE GUNS OF THE ENEMY AS THEY RACED ALONG BESIDE THE CONVOY ..


BOB HUDSON STROVE DESPERATELY TO HOLD THE ENEMY COMMANDER FOR A FLEETING SECOND IN THE SIGHTS OF THE RIFLE HE HAD SNATCHED UP. AT LAST
AAGH!
ACH! OUR LEADER IS HIT!


THE FIRST ARMOURED CAR SLOWED AND SWUNG AWAY BUT THE SECOND BORE IN AVENGINGLY. ITS COMMANDER SCREAMED AN ORDER ...
THAT LEADING TRUCK ... FEUER! ... FEUER! ... FEUER!

THE TRUCK WAS RIPPED APART BY THE TORNADO OF STEEL THAT WAS HURLED AT IT!

BOB RECOVERED HIS SENSES A FEW MOMENTS LATER TO REALISE THAT THE GUNFIRE HAD BECOME MORE DISTANT... AND THAT THERE WAS A DIFFERENT QUALITY TO IT...
TH-THANK HEAVENS! OUR TANKS...

A SQUADRON OF BRITISH TANKS HAD COME UPON THE SCENE AND WERE ENGAGING THE ENEMY WITH THEIR HEAVY CALIBRE GUNS.
THE RESCUE WAS TIMELY BUT SUCCEEDED ONLY IN SAVING A PITIFUL REMNANT OF LIFE. GREY WITH SHOCK, BOB AND A FEW OTHER SURVIVORS WERE FOUND AND TAKEN SAFELY BEHIND THE BRITISH LINES.

# Chapter 3. DUMMY GUNS

BOB AWOKE FROM A BOUT OF CONCUSSION IN A CAIRO HOSPITAL TO FIND HIS BAD DREAMS MATCHED BY THE BLACK MEMORIES OF THE MASSACRE OF THE CONVOY.

THAT CRAZY CAMOUFLAGE! THAT'S WHAT MY CHAPS DIED FOR! GOOD MEN SHOT TO PIECES JUST BECAUSE OF A FEW SCRAPS OF CANVAS..

TAKE IT EASY, SON!

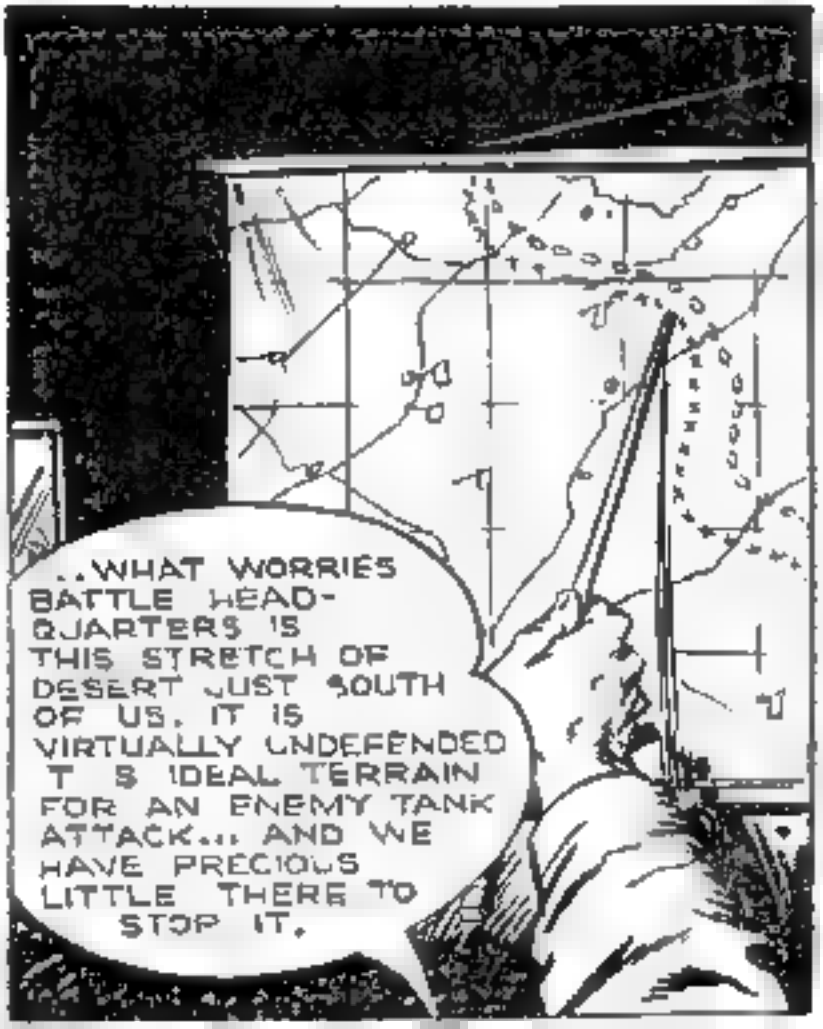
FEVERISHLY, BOB SUDDENLY SWITCHED TO THE CAUSE OF HIS BITTERNESS.

IF THAT MAN STARK GOT KILLED, TOO, THEN HE DESERVED IT! BUT NOT MY BOYS!

THAT'S FOOLISH, LEUTENANT. ANYWAY, MAJOR STARK CAME THROUGH ALIVE.

REPORTING FIT ONCE MORE TO HIS REGIMENT, BOB WAS RECEIVED BY COLONEL BOWLEY WHO SOON NOTICED THE GRIM-LOOKING CHANGE IN HIS JUNIOR OFFICER.
WHEN ARE WE GOING TO CHUCK ROMMEL OUT OF EGYPT SIR?
CHUCK HIM OUT! WE'LL BE LUCKY IF WE CAN HOLD HIM ON THE CAIRO FRONTIER. THE QUESTION IS, WHERE WILL *HE* STRIKE... AND WHEN?

THE COLONEL EXPLAINED THEIR OWN POSITION...
THE REGIMENT IS MANNING A DEFENSIVE BOX ASTRIDE THIS MAIN ROAD AT ALAMEIN...


..WHAT WORRIES BATTLE HEAD-QUARTERS IS THIS STRETCH OF DESERT JUST SOUTH OF US. IT IS VIRTUALLY UNDEFENDED T S IDEAL TERRAIN FOR AN ENEMY TANK ATTACK... AND WE HAVE PRECIOUS LITTLE THERE TO STOP IT.

BUT THAT'S TERRIBLE, SIR!
I AGREE, HUDSON. BUT ALL THAT THE EIGHTH ARMY CAN DO AT THE MOMENT IS TO BUY TIME .. AND THEY'LL DO, ANYTHING THAT WILL MAKE ROMMEL HESITATE TO ATTACK IN THIS THINLY-HELD SECTOR.

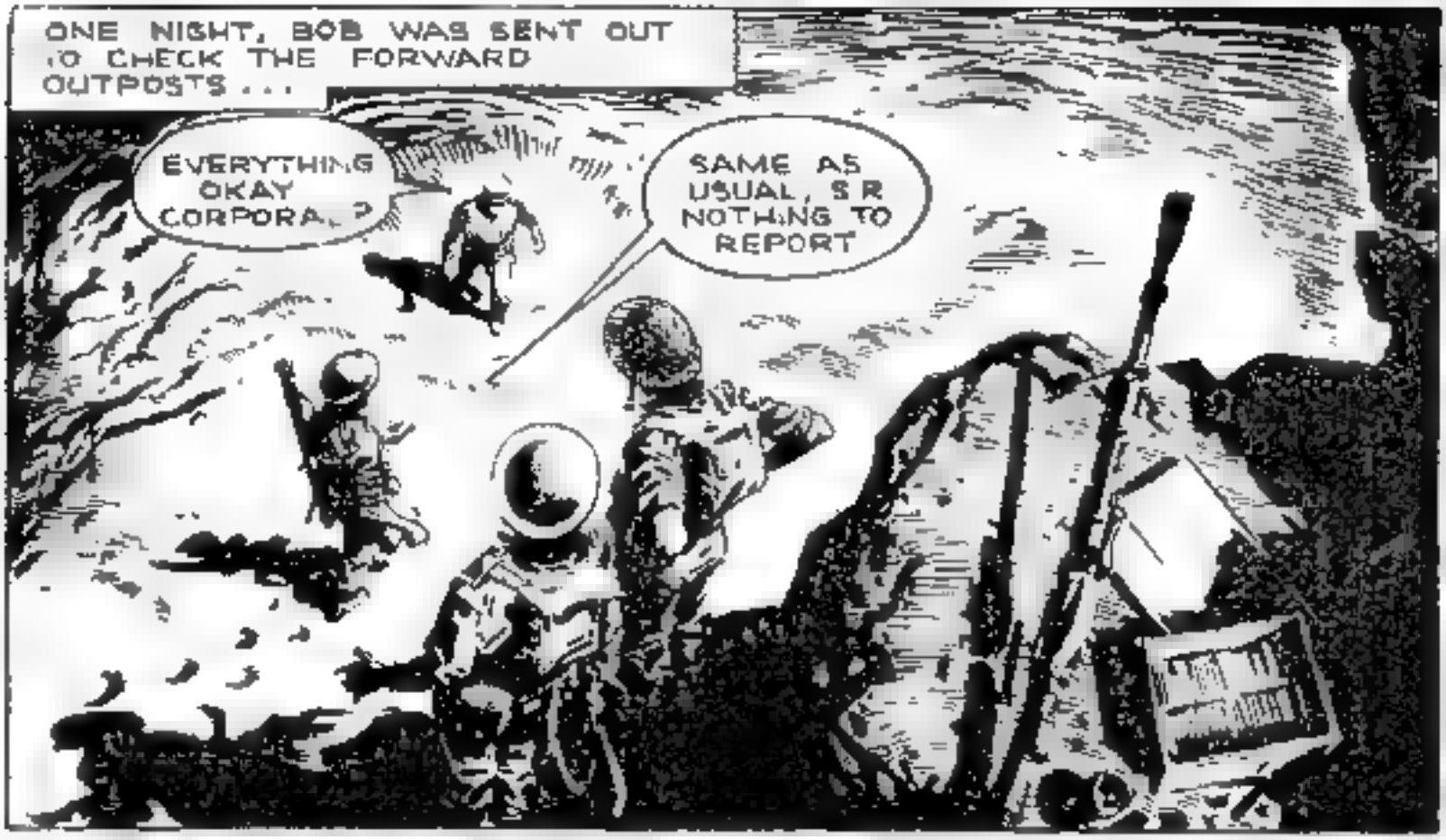
AND BOB HUDSON WAS SOON INTRODUCED TO ONE OF THE MEASURES BEING TAKEN BY THE EIGHTH ARMY TO HOODWINK THE ENEMY INTO BELIEVING THAT THE DANGER SECTOR WAS WELL GUARDED.
OH, NO! IT'S THAT MAJOR STARK AGAIN!
GENTLEMEN — TO YOU THIS MAY LOOK LIKE A JUMBLE OF NETTING AND CANVAS. BUT FROM THE AIR, WHEN ERECTED, IT WILL LOOK LIKE A GENUINE GUN PIT.

THE SOUNDS OF CRITICAL DISBELIEF AMONGST THE OTHER WATCHERS EGGED BOB HUDSON INTO UTTERING HIS OWN SCATHING COMMENTS ... IN A VOICE ALL COULD HEAR. .
'LL BELIEVE ALL THIS WHEN I SEE IT.
AFTER THAT DUMMY HARBOUR FIASCO I WONDER THE CAMOUFLAGE CORPS HASN'T BEEN DISBANDED. IT'S AS PHONEY AS THE THINGS I PUTS UP.
THERE WAS A SHORT EMBARRASSED SILENCE AND THEN MAJOR STARK WENT ON AS IF NOTHING HAD HAPPENED.

AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION, MAJOR STARK TRIED A FRIENDLY APPROACH WITH BOB BUT GOT NOTHING BUT SCORNFUL REMARKS FOR HIS PAINS.
DUMMY GUNS! A FINE THING TO HAVE PROTECTING YOUR FLANKS!
NOT ALL DUMMY, HUDSON. THERE'S A FEW REAL ONES TO GIVE THE ILLUSION OF A GENUINE BATTERY.
JERRY WILL LAUGH HIS HEAD OFF

DAYS LATER, BOB HAD A CHANCE TO SEE HIS WORST FEARS REALISED. HIS JAUNDICED EYE TOOK IN THE LINE OF DUMMY GUN PITS MADE UP OF NOTHING BUT CANVAS, NETTING, STAKES AND STRING. TO HIM THEY LOOKED JUST AS LUDICROUS AS THE FLAPPING "DECKING" HE HAD SEEN AT THE ILL-FATED HARBOUR.
BEATS ME HOW THE GENERAL GOT TALKED INTO IT, SIR. NO GERMAN RECCE PLANE IS GOING TO BE FOOLED BY THIS LOT.
WE SHALL SEE, MY BOY.. WE SHALL SEE.

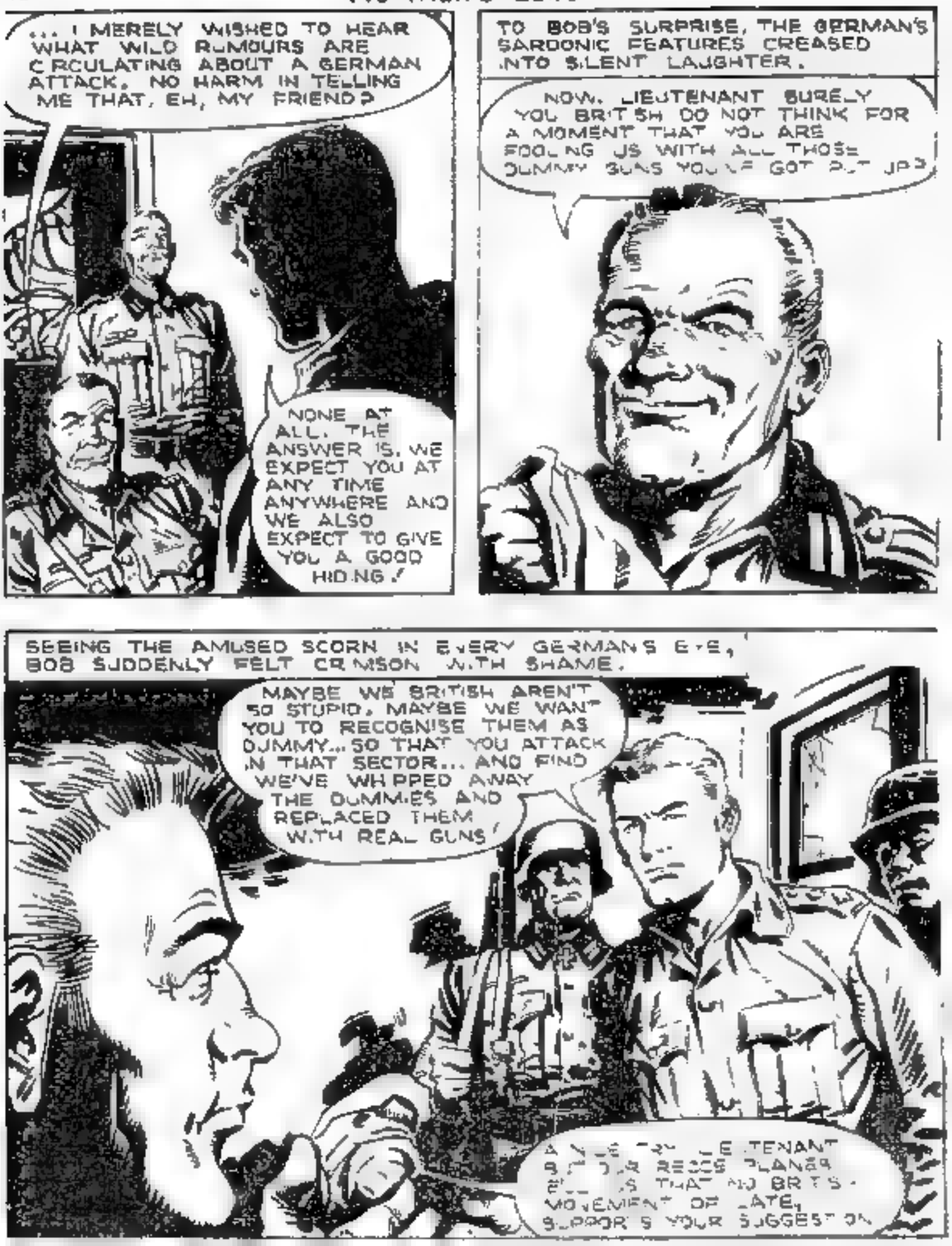
TENSION MOUNTED AS THE DAYS PASSED. NOT FOR A MOMENT DID THE HANDFUL OF BRITISH TROOPS RELAX THEIR VIGILANCE... BUT STILL NO RISING CLOUD OF DUST HERALDED THE EXPECTED AFRIKA KORPS' ASSAULT.
WE MUST STAND FIRM IF ROMMEL BREAKS THROUGH, HE'LL BE IN CAIRO, AND THE ROAD TO INDIA WILL BE WIDE OPEN.


ONE NIGHT, BOB WAS SENT OUT TO CHECK THE FORWARD OUTPOSTS...
EVERYTHING OKAY CORPORAL?
SAME AS USUAL, SIR NOTHING TO REPORT

THEN, WITHOUT WARNING, BURLY FIGURES LEAPED FROM THE DARKNESS UPON THE FOUR MEN...
ONE PRISONER... THAT'S ALL WE WANT!

BOB HUDSON WAS THE OBVIOUS CHOKE FOR THE GERMAN RAIDING PATROL. HE FOUGHT LIKE A LION, AND IT TOOK FOUR OF THE ENEMY TO OVERPOWER HIM.
GOOT! THAT SETTLES THE SWINE!

THE DAZED LIEUTENANT WAS TAKEN TO ENEMY HEADQUARTERS AND BROUGHT BEFORE HEINRICH HOLMEYER, AN ASTUTE INTELLIGENCE OFFICER...
HAVE NO FEAR, LIEUTENANT, THAT WE SHALL MAKE YOU TALK WE ALREADY KNOW ALL WE NEED TO DESTROY THE BRITISH...


... I MERELY WISHED TO HEAR WHAT WILD RUMOURS ARE CIRCULATING ABOUT A GERMAN ATTACK. NO HARM IN TELLING ME THAT, EH, MY FRIEND?
NONE AT ALL. THE ANSWER IS, WE EXPECT YOU AT ANY TIME ANYWHERE AND WE ALSO EXPECT TO GIVE YOU A GOOD HIDING!
TO BOB'S SURPRISE, THE GERMAN'S SARDONIC FEATURES CREASED INTO SILENT LAUGHTER.
NOW, LIEUTENANT SURELY YOU BRITISH DO NOT THINK FOR A MOMENT THAT YOU ARE FOOLING US WITH ALL THOSE DUMMY GUNS YOU'VE GOT PUT UP?
SEEING THE AMUSED SCORN IN EVERY GERMAN'S EYE, BOB SUDDENLY FELT CRIMSON WITH SHAME.
MAYBE WE BRITISH AREN'T SO STUPID. MAYBE WE WANT YOU TO RECOGNISE THEM AS DUMMY... SO THAT YOU ATTACK IN THAT SECTOR... AND FIND WE'VE WHIPPED AWAY THE DUMMIES AND REPLACED THEM WITH REAL GUNS!
A NICE TRY, LIEUTENANT BUT OUR RECCE PLANES ELL US THAT NO BRITISH MOVEMENT OF LATE, SUPPORTS YOUR SUGGESTION

SUDDENLY THE GERMAN SPRANG TO HIS FEET...
AND THE BRITISH HAVE NO TIME TO BRING UP THE REAL GUNS... FOR THE GLORIOUS GERMAN AFRIKA KORPS WILL ALREADY BE ATTACKING THAT SECTOR AT DAWN TOMORROW! TAKE HIM AWAY!

BUT THERE WAS ONE FINAL SMILING WORD AND FOR BOB HUDSON IT WAS LIKE A COLD KNIFE TO THE HEART
WE WERE NOT WHOLLY SURE WHETHER THOSE WERE DUMMY GUNS OR NOT AND NOW, MY FRIEND, YOU HAVE OBLIGINGLY CONFIRMED THAT THEY ARE ... UNWITTINGLY, NATURALLY!
THE GERMAN OFFICER'S GUILE HAD FOUND THE ONE CHINK IN BOB'S SECURITY ARMOUR... HIS POOR OPINION OF CAMOUFLAGE AND THEREBY HAD TRICKED THE YOUNG SOLDIER INTO AN INDISCRETION

MARCHED OFF BETWEEN HIS GUARDS, BOB SUFFERED AN AGONY OF MIND THAT PICTURED THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF HIS CRASS STUPIDITY. HE SAW THE GERMAN ARMOUR SWEEPING THROUGH THE DUMMY DEFENDED SECTOR AND BLENCHED AT THE THOUGHT THAT HE ALONE WAS CRIMINALLY RESPONSIBLE.

SUDDENLY, THE NIGHTMARE PICTURES BECAME UNBEARABLE. WITH A SAVAGE MOVEMENT, HE LASHED OUT AT HIS GUARDS...
ACH!

THE TWO GERMANS WERE BUNDLED OFF THEIR FEET BY THE SUDDENNESS OF THE ASSAULT... AND BOB TOOK TO HIS HEELS ..
GOT TO GET BACK ! GOT TO WARN THEM!
HALT!

BOB WON CLEAR OF THE GERMAN CAMP BUT PATROLS WERE SOON SPREADING OUT TO CUT HIM OFF ..
THERE HE GOES!

ABOVE THE GASPING CROAK OF HIS BREATH BOB HEARD THE CRACK OF A RIFLE A SEARING PAIN BIT INTO HIS SHOULDER
UGH!

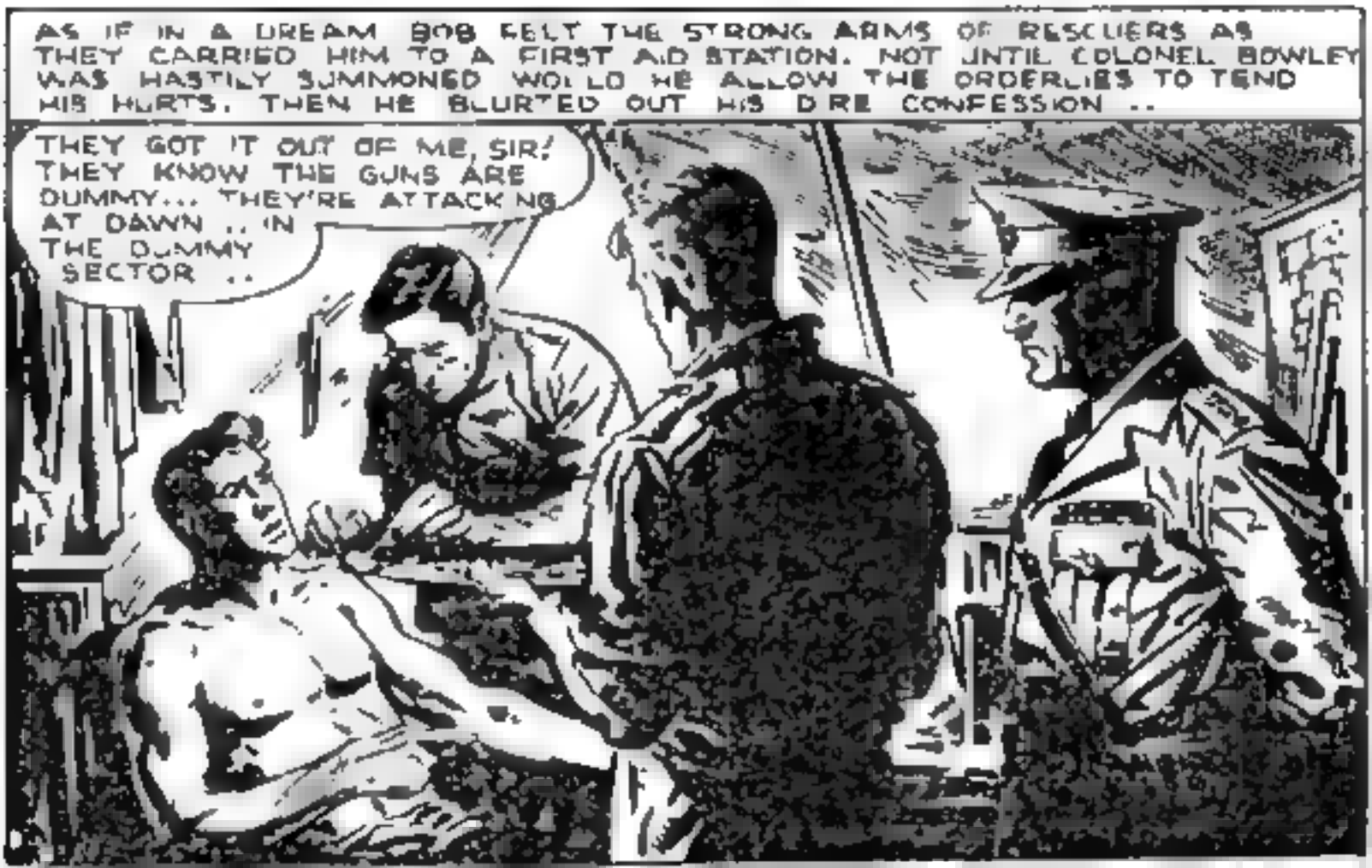
HE STUMBLED, MISSED HIS FOOTING AND PLUNGED OVER THE EDGE OF THE ROCKY ESCARPMENT.
GOOD SHOT FRITZ. DES KAPUT ERLEDIGT!
WE WILL LEAVE HIS CARCASS TO THE JACKALS!

BOB FELL FORTY FEET BUT A SLOPE OF LOOSE RUBBLE AT THE BASE OF THE CLIFF BROKE HIS FALL. HE LOST HIS SENSES FOR A TIME BUT RECOVERED TO FIND HIMSELF A MASS OF CUTS AND BRUISES PAINFULLY, HE TRIED TO CLIMB TO HIS FEET ..

MUSTN'T PASS OUT GOT TO KEEP GOING!

THEN BEGAN A GRUELLING RACE AGAINST TIME AS BOB MATCHED HIS DRAINING STRENGTH AGAINST THE FLOOD OF PAIN AND THE TORTUOUS DESERT MILES ...

# Chapter 4. SILENT WEAPON



HIS WOUND AND INJURIES DRESSED, BOB WAS WHISKED TO BATTLE HEADQUARTERS TO REPEAT HIS SHAMEFACED STORY TO THE ARMY COMMANDER HIMSELF. BUT INSTEAD OF THE EXPLOSION OF RAGE HE EXPECTED, BOB WAS QUESTIONED EAGERLY...
TELL ME, HUDSON, ARE YOU POSITIVE IN YOUR MIND THAT THE ENEMY WILL ATTACK IN THAT DUMMY SECTOR?
I'M SURE OF IT, SIR.

THE GENERAL RELAXED, A LOOK OF SATISFACTION ON HIS FACE. THE STIR OF EXCITEMENT THAT WENT ROUND THE ROOM MYSTIFIED BOB HUDSON UNTIL THE OFFICER BEGAN TO EXPLAIN ..
YOU HIT ON THE TRUTH, HUDSON, THE SCHEME... KNOWN ONLY TO A FEW... WAS TO ARTFULLY LET THE GERMANS SEE THAT THE BATTERIES *WERE* DUMMY... AND SO INDUCE THEM TO ATTACK IN THAT AREA NOW, THANKS TO YOU, MY BOY, *WE ARE CERTAIN THAT THEY WILL!*

ALL WE HAVE TO DO NOW IS WHIP AWAY THE DUMMY GUNS AND RUSH THE REAL GUNS INTO THEIR PLACE!
BUT BUT WE HAVEN'T ANY GUNS NEAR ENOUGH TO GET THERE IN TIME, SIR!
OH, NO? I'LL GET SOMEONE TO SHOW YOU, YOUNG FELLA!

OUTSIDE, COLONEL BOWLEY MOTIONED TO A BESPECTACLED FIGURE STANDING, WAITING ... IT WAS MAJOR STARK.
STARK, MY BOY... IT'S WORKED! BUT THERE'S NOT A SECOND TO LOSE... LET'S GO!
LIKE IT OR NOT, BOB FOUND HIMSELF PROPELLED BESIDE THE CAMOUFLAGE MAJOR TOWARDS A WAITING JEEP.

THE JEEP RACED ACROSS THE DESERT, DUST BOILING IN ITS WAKE. AHEAD A NUMBER OF VEHICLES WERE DEPLOYED WITH MEN MOVING ABOUT THEM...
HERE WE ARE, SIR!
BUT THESE ARE TRUCKS. WHERE ARE THE GUNS?

THE JEEP SKIDDED TO A HALT AND THE OFFICERS DISMOUNTED IN TIME TO SEE AN AMAZING TRANSFORMATION SCENE. BOB COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE HIS EYES.
THE MOST ASTONISHING DISGUISE OF GUNS I'VE EVER SEEN, MAJOR! WONDERFUL!
THANK YOU, COLONEL!

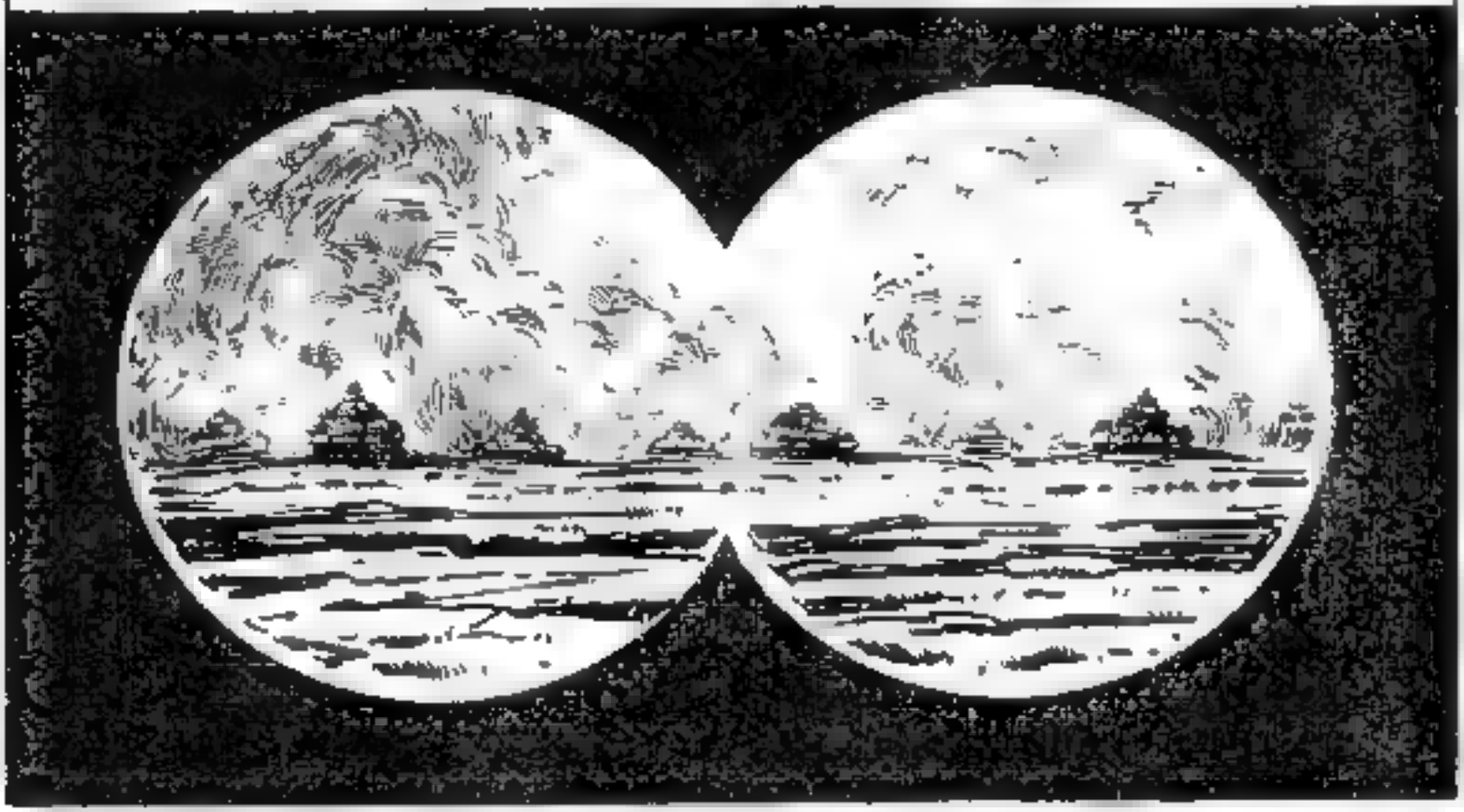
DESPITE HIMSELF, BOB FELT A MOUNTING EXCITEMENT AS THE JEEP FELL IN WITH A LONG LINE OF CLATTERING GUNS SPEEDING TOWARDS THE FRONT...
THREE HOURS BEFORE DAWN... WE'LL JUST ABOUT MAKE IT!

AT THE FORWARD POSITIONS, STARK SAW WITHOUT A TRACE OF REGRET HIS CLEVER DUMMY GUN PITS TORN AWAY TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE REAL THING. SUDDENLY HE FELT BOB AT HIS ELBOW...
I RECKON I'D BETTER EAT MY WORDS ABOUT CAMOUFLAGE, MAJOR I NEVER BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE.
THAT'S ALL RIGHT, OLD CHAP NO HARD FEELINGS.
AND WITH THOSE FEW SIMPLE WORDS, THE LONG-STANDING RIFT BETWEEN THE TWO MEN WAS HEALED.

THE FURIOUS PREPARATIONS WENT ON. THE SWEATING PANTING GUNNERS SLAVED AGAINST THE CLOCK UNTIL FINALLY, AS IF WITH A SIGH OF UTTER SATISFACTION, THE SCURRY OF ACTIVITY CEASED. A TENSE WATCHFUL SILENCE FOLLOWED...
TEN MINUTES TO GO TO DAWN.

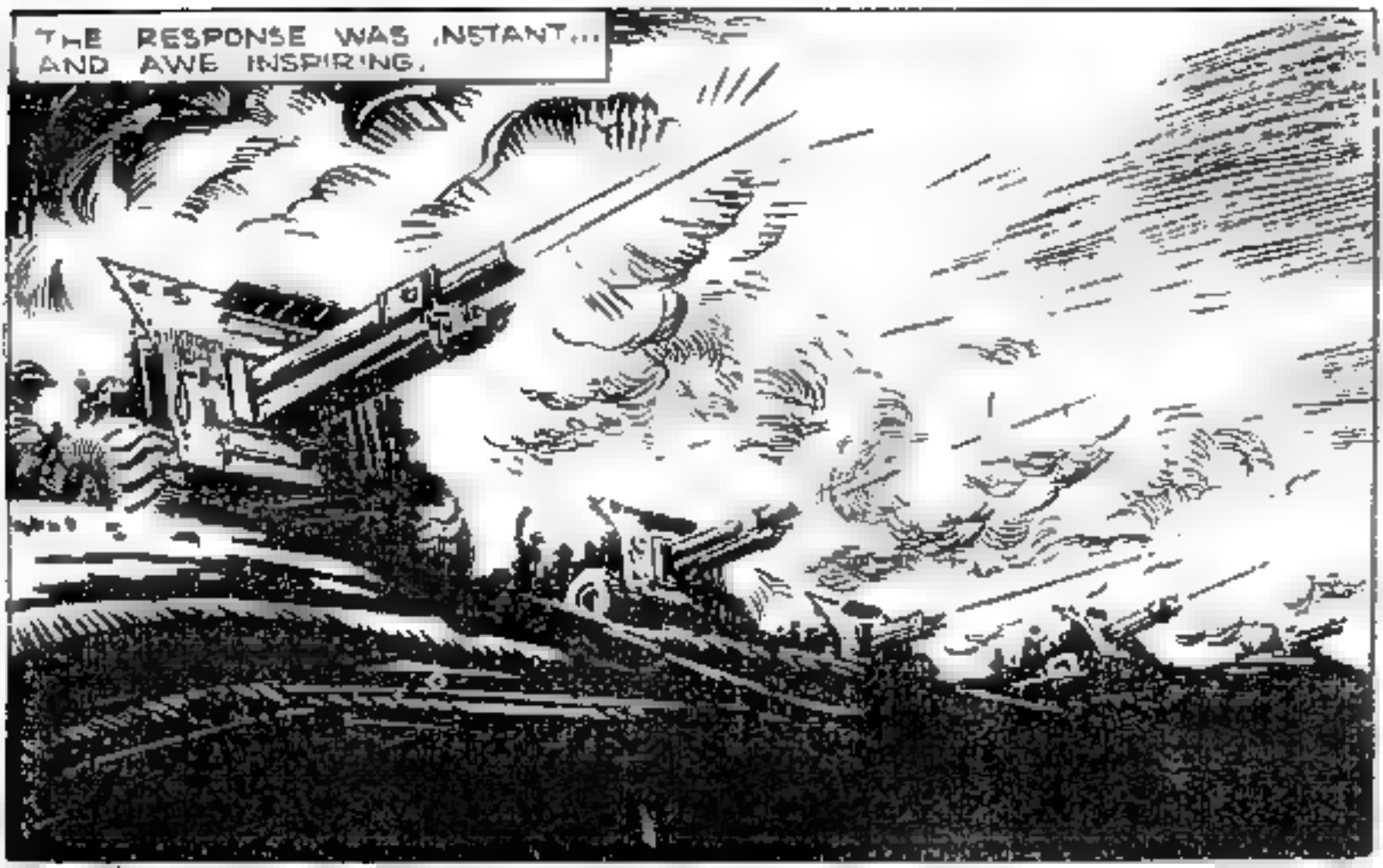
AMID THAT LINE OF WAITING MEN AND GUNS, BOB HUDSON FELT A SUDDEN UPRUSH OF PRIDE. IT WAS GOOD TO BE ALIVE AND STRONG AND A PART OF THIS IMMORTAL EIGHTH ARMY!
NEITHER HAD HE FORGOTTEN HIS LESSON, THAT EACH MAN FIGHTS HIS WAR ACCORDING TO HIS OWN WEAPONS... WHETHER IT BE RIFLE, BOMB OR MERE BITS OF STRING AND CANVAS.

THEN THROUGH THE GREY HALF-LIGHT OF THAT MEMORABLE DAWN APPEARED THE CLANKING, STEEL-FLANKED JUGGERNAUTS OF ROMMEL'S PANZER TANKS... THE PRIDE OF THE AFRIKA KORPS.



ON THEY THUNDERED, THE SEEMINGLY IRRESISTIBLE TIDE OF ARMOUR THEIR CREWS BRASHLY CONFIDENT IN THEIR IGNORANCE...

SUDDENLY A PERCING WHISTLE SPLIT THE MORNING AIR...


THE RESPONSE WAS INSTANT... AND AWE INSPIRING.

THE SHELLS HAMMERED HOME WITH UNERRING AIM AND THAT FIRST RANK OF THE ENEMY WAS REDUCED TO A SHAMBLES OF STRICKEN, BURNING TANKS.

UNABLE, OR MAYBE UNWILLING TO BELIEVE THIS REVERSAL OF ALL THAT THEY HAD BEEN LED TO EXPECT, THE REST OF THE GERMAN ARMOUR WAVERED AND THEN CAME ON... ONLY TO IMPALE ITSELF EVEN MORE DISASTROUSLY ON THE SHARP SHOOTING OF THE BRITISH GUNS

ONLY A SHELL-RAVAGED REMNANT OF THAT ONCE MIGHTY PANZER DIVISION LIMPED AWAY TO BEAR THE REPORT OF THE DISASTER TO THEIR FUMING COMMANDER.
WE WERE TRICKED, MEIN OBERSTLEUTNANT... THEY WERE REAL GUNS. HIMMEL! WHAT GUNS!
ACH! THE ACCURSED BRITISH HAVE FOOLED ME WITH A DOUBLE-BLUFF!
IT WAS TO BE THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF NAZI DREAMS OF DOMINATION IN THE AFRICAN DESERT AND BEYOND.

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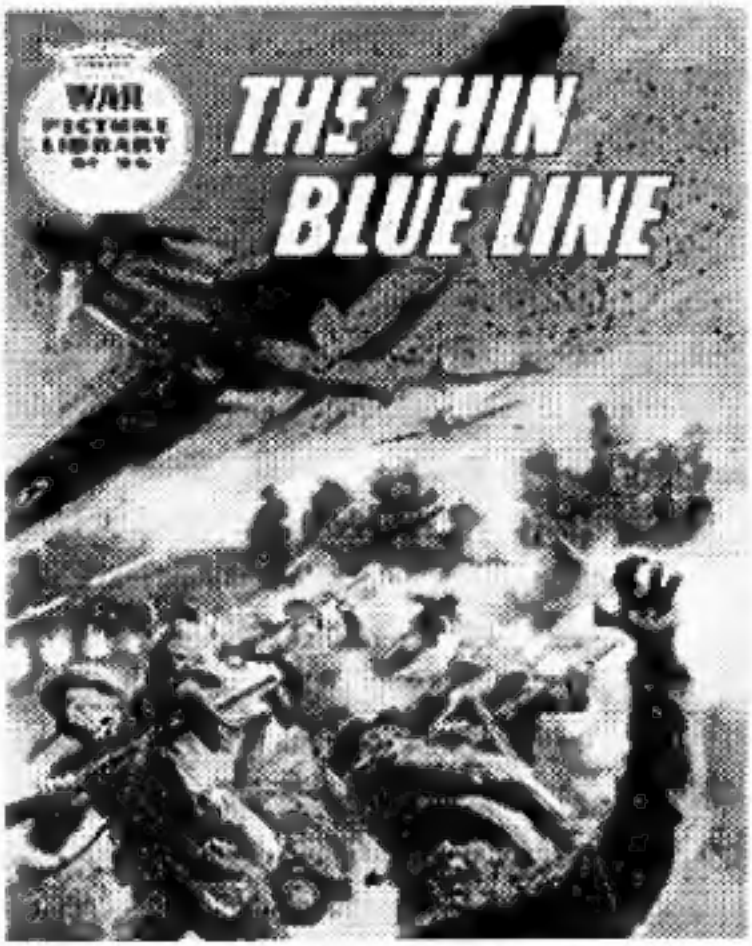


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